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AN IMPERIAL CONSPIRACY.

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by

GRAHAM MARTYR, F.R.G.S.

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1910.

THE NORTH CHINA PRINTING AND PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
TIENTSIN, NORTH CHINA.

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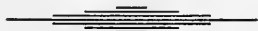
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PROLOGUE.

As I said to my young brother at the time, there is a good deal in the old writing, and so in fact there was, a good deal more than we guessed. It was all owing to the roaming spirit which has affected my family from olden times and which caused my ancestor Roger to sail for East Indian Seas in the middle of the seventeenth century. The same fate which took him to Pegu in 1645 ordained that my brother and I should go to the Far East in 1904 and the wonderful consequences that followed. But if you are to understand my story you must cast your mind back and remember the things which were happening in Cathay at that time.

The Dynasty of the Mings had just lost their empire to the conquering Manchus. The last of the old Imperial House, Yung Lieh, had been proclaimed Emperor in Kwangse, but had to fly to Pegu in Lower Burmah, where he arrived shortly after Roger Saltwood's advent in the *Red Rose* on a trading expedition projected by some merchants of Rye and Hythe in the Romney Marsh. Thus it was that he became connected with the exiled Chinese Imperial Family and passed through the extraordinary adventures the character of which may be gathered from the letters he left to his descendants. The Saltwoods are a somewhat unimagi-

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native race and the memory of Roger's travels was preserved amongst us in the same way as the old nursery rhymes. My temperament, however, differs from the rest of my family, owing no doubt to our dear little Mother being a Dane, and the old story of great-great—ever so many greats—grandfather Roger has always aroused the keenest interest in my mind. I have taken a copy of the old document and, weeded out some of the old archaic expressions, here it is.



Narrative of the Lord Roger de Saltwode, Grandee of the Empire of Cathay.

I, Roger de Saltwode, having come back into old England after the many strange adventures which befel me in the East Indies and the land of Cathay, do here set down so much of them as I deem needful for the information of my posterity that perchance, when the time is ripe, they may reap the result and reward of my toil, and come into the great inheritance which shall be theirs if matters come to pass, as I indeed believe they will, in God his own good time.

For, sailing from Southampton in the year of grace 1644, we came through many dangers round the Cape of Good Hope, which is to the South of the African Continent, and having provisioned and refitted there, so proceeded unto the Islands called Seychelles, and thence to Ceylon, a fair and rich land. These seas are much infested with the Hollanders and Portuguese, but we escaped all oppositions and our ventures prospered well. It was in July of 1645 that, sailing to the Coasts of the Malays, we came into the river and harbour of Pegu, and here Fate overtook my footsteps.

Our vessel had lain in this port over a month, during which time we had been allowed to proceed on

shore by the authorities, who were very friendly. Pegu is a most magnificent city, well dight, and the capital of the Kingdom of Ta Lieng. Their King is united by marriage to the old Imperial Family of Cathay, the House of Ming, who had been driven from their throne some years before by the Tartar hordes, and whose descendant, the Prince Yung Lieh, was now living at the Palace of the King his cousin. The Prince had not lost hope of some day recovering his crown, and at this time was preparing an army to go North-wards to make one great attempt to seize the throne of his fathers and drive the Northern Barbarians out of Cathay, whom they told me had over-run the country and set up their own Emperor.

It chanced that by the kindness of the Governor, who much desired certain merchandise of ours, our curiosity being very great to behold the Chinese Prince, we were enabled to witness a great ceremony at the Golden Temple which lies without the City, where all the Court attended. Here I first saw Yung Lieh, which was the cause of wonderful happenings in my life. He was quite young, not more than 25 years old, clothed in the yellow robes Chinese Royalty wears, with his black hair combed back and raised in a fantastic fashion over his head. It seemed to me that he looked at us English with great curiosity and questioning, and admiration too, at which, indeed, I did not wonder, so that I was not very surprised when next day the Master of the *Red Rose* and I were summoned to the Palace. We

thought the curiosity of the Prince had been aroused by seeing us at the Temple the day before, and that he wished to question us about things Western, so we took with us certain articles of our home manufacture to present to His Highness. Yung Lieh received us kindly, and at once began to speak rapidly to the Interpreter, glancing and pointing frequently at my sword as he did so. The interpreter then told what the Prince had said to another interpreter, for all the speech hereto had been in the Chinese language, which was understood by the Burman Secretary, who in turn passed the meaning on to a Burmese who spoke Portuguese, which I understand in some sort. So I presently knew that Yung Lieh, in his own right Emperor of Cathay, was preparing an army to win back his lost throne and knowing of the skill of Europeans in these matters, asked that I would cast in my fortunes with him to train his men and help him to regain his patrimony, in which event I was promised riches and honours beyond any I could dream of. I wot not what to reply to this astonishing proposal, and thanking His Highness, craved two days for thought, after which I would give my answer.

I will not weary you by recounting all my reasons for deciding to accept this offer, which my adventurous spirit urged me to, and the unknown glories and places to which this strange destiny might lead. Suffice it that although I was my father's eldest son, (he had three others), I was unmarried and had none dependant on me and my brothers being, when I last saw them, all

strong and lusty, might well be looked to to carry on the succession of our ancient family. Also no doubt ever rested in my mind but that I should see my dear native land again. So on the second day I waited on His Highness and placed my experience and services at his disposal, which he was graciously pleased to accept.

To repeat the story of the next five years is to me a weariness of the flesh. The Emperor was a most amiable youth, whom I loved, and all I could do in advising and organizing I did. His Majesty, proclaimed Emperor of Cathay in Kwangtung for a second time, his army beaten and disheartened at last reached Canton, whither I accompanied him, together with the Empress and their infant son, Shin Shih Fu Yuen, that is being interpreted, "Happy Restoration."

Now, mark well, my son, who may read this, for on what follows may depend your fortunes and advancement, perchance such a career as hath ever fallen to few men of our race and country before.

There was another European in Canton at the time it fell before the attack of the Manchus, a man named Martini, who hath written a history of the events which then took place and from him you may be instructed in them all. So I will not relate the historic story, but simply the part I played and the wonderful trust confided in me, whereby we hold a secret which, when the time is come, shall unseat the family which now usurps the Dragon Throne and replace thereon the true Heir.

Canton fell on the 24th November, 1652. On the day preceding, we knew all hope was lost and made the best arrangements we could for the escape of the Emperor and Empress and the infant Prince. It was settled that I was to accompany them, together with a Chinese nobleman who had acted as a principal advisor to Yung Lieh. We were to take boat down the river and join a great ship at the mouth of it whence we should sail to the southward and, if we escaped the perils of the coast and islands of those seas, endeavour to reach Pegu. It was a desperate adventure but we had no other recourse.

On the evening of the 23rd November the Manchus commenced their final attack and I was hastily summoned to the Emperor's presence. Everything had been prepared for our flight and now the time was come. His Majesty appeared much agitated and depressed. He walked over to me holding his son in his arms and asked me to be loyal and true to the prince as I had been to himself. This I swore, on my honour as an English Gentleman, I would be. The Emperor then said:

“My honoured friend, it may chance that this will be my last night on earth before I shall ascend to heaven. I commit this my son, the hope of China, to your especial care, and in his name promise that when he or his sons again ascend their paternal throne then thou shalt ask and receive anything thou wilt, and be amongst the chiefest in the Empire. So I now create

thee a Guardian of the Heir Apparent and ennoble thee to the second degree of the first rank. The Great Ruler of the Universe, whose representative I am, watch over thee and thine for ever."

We were both much moved and I whispered my thanks and loyalty. The Emperor then handed to me the two great jade seals of the Empire of the Mings to be in my keeping. The one thou shalt see later, but of that more anon.

These things being done, Yung Lieh took leave of his captains, and the five of us who were to escape came down by the water's edge near the island which is called Shameen, and embarked in the boat which was to take us down the swift-rolling river to the sea. A few members of the Household saw to our embarking and then helped push the boat from the land, weeping bitterly. Likewise the Emperor was much affected, but the Empress lay in a torpor with her child at her breast.

Never can I forget that dreadful voyage, the memory of which haunts my dreams. I placed myself in the bows of the boat keeping a vigilant watch, for the environs of the city were overrun by the Manchus, who would hardly have neglected to see if any persons escaped by the river. It was a wet night and very cold and my discomfort was rendered the more great by the two large jade seals which I had strapped to my person within my clothes. For five hours we descended the stream swiftly, and approached the mouth at the place the Portugese call the Boca Tigris.

My hopes that we should now escape began to rise, for the sea-going vessel we had arranged for should be close hereabouts. But suddenly the Empress, who had until now lain supine in the boat, rose to her feet and wailed long and loudly. The Emperor attempted to quiet her, but it was too late. Faint flickerings of light were seen on the banks near the entrance, a din arose, and soon bonfires were blazing brightly whilst several boats appeared making for us. There was yet a chance that by exerting our utmost speed we might get through the mouth before we were cut off and I urged the boatmen to put forth their full strength. We were all converging to a single point, three boats on our larboard bow and two on our starboard. It soon became apparent that we should never get through, and then Yung Lieh was overcome with bitterness.

“Oh woman” he said, “poor woman, what hast thou done?” Then turning to me:—“Save my son!”

In the boat were several wicker baskets in which these people carry oil, made water-tight by plaster and chinam. In one of these I placed the young Prince, who seemed to know though wide awake, that he must make no sound. I can see his round face and wondering eyes yet. Then I made obeisance to the Emperor and turned to the Empress to do the same. His Majesty held both my hands and looking at me earnestly said “Remember”. Had I but known it, at about the same time, my own Sovereign, that ever-blessed martyr of sacred memory, King Charles I, was saying the same

word to Bishop Juxton on his scaffold. That was the last word I heard Yung Lieh say, for the time was short. I lowered myself and the baby in its basket over the stern and when the frail receptacle floated, I held on by the projecting rudder, and was towed down in the wake of the boat, for the surface of the river was illuminated by the fires and our only chance lay in keeping in the black shadow of the skiff.

The water was bitterly cold, but my excitement was so great I only remembered it afterwards. The babe was covered with clothes and remained quiet, I hoped it slept. Then the Manchu boats caught us and closing alongside rushed our craft. There was no fighting, but the splash of a body near me told what was happening. In the dancing light I saw the Empress float past me face upwards, and I may truly hope dead, for I saw blood on her and she was young and comely. The barbarians kept up the most indescribable din. All the while the boat swayed and I had much difficulty in retaining my hold. I noted with thankfulness that the fires were beginning to die down and the illuminations to grow less. I decided to push off and swim down the current with my precious basket, but before doing so raised myself up a little to see the Emperor, if I could, for the last time. He was kneeling on a board with his face towards me. The Manchus were intent on their work and their fierce squat faces shone in the fitful light. Around Yung Lieh's neck was a hempen cord, and as I gazed they applied the pressure. I think the dying

Prince saw me, for I saw a faint smile illumine the pitiful eyes and the lips moved, perhaps in a last appeal. I put all my soul into my gaze and raised my hand to him to shew His Majesty I would be fearless and true, and as his face grew distorted I dropped softly into the water and with a heavy heart pushed off with my burden. Swimming quietly clear of the cluster of boats I made for the centre of the stream and drifted down with the current in the blessed darkness. In the East the day began to shew in grey light as I saw I had cleared the Boca Tigris. For two hours we drifted thus and then far away at last I saw the leaning masts of a ship. I knew not if it were ours, but our lives depended on our reaching it, so I steered in its direction.

The current was strong near the point where the vessel lay and I feared to lay hold of the rope cable lest my basket should be washed under. The red sun arose as I drew nearer and I saw there were men on her decks. I came level with her bows and as I was carried rapidly past, I shouted with all my strength (for my six years with these people had taught me their tongue) "Help, the Emperor!"

They had heard me, for there was a commotion on board her, but I was now washed past with the swift current, so headed for the land near by on which I presently grounded and waited for the ship's boat which was soon in rapid pursuit. I lifted the babe from its basket and walked with it to the shore. As I came to the land a magnificent peacock rose up with his tail

spread, the eyes in it glistening in the rising sun, which I took to be an auspicious omen, for the Peacock is the Imperial bird of Cathay. The skiff was now come to the shore and to my great joy I found we had indeed fallen in with our ship. Before I left the land, standing with my feet pressing the ground of his Empire, I proclaimed the baby Sovereign by the name of "Happy Restoration" after which I let him pat with his tiny hands the ground. Then embarking on the skiff we came to the vessel which rapidly got under weigh for fear of pursuit and put to sea. The Imperial Seals I shewed the Master and Officials, and we steered southwards, bound for Pegu.

For seven months we sailed the Eastern Seas, encountering great storms and adverse winds, but in June 1653 we haply made Pegu, and cast anchor off the city. Certain of the Ming adherents, who had escaped from the wrath of the Tartars, had made their way overland to the friendly King of the Ta Liang, to whom they had related the whole disastrous story. Day after day our vessel had been watched for and after all hope had almost expired, we appeared, being welcomed with much joy, the King himself coming on board in his barge to receive the Emperor. To him we told all that had happened after leaving Canton and shewed him the infant Emperor. He and all their following shewed much grief for the loss of Yung Lieh and his Empress and mourned solemnly for many days. Arrangements were than made for Yu Yuen to be taken to a Monastery in Thibet, there to be brought up and to wait until an

opportunity occurred to recover his crown. Thither I too accompanied him, bearing the Great Seals, being treated with much honour. I delivered my Imperial Ward over to the Abbot of the great Monastery of Jumlambo, also one of the State Seals, the other I retained by reason of my high office and also that it might be a pledge of who I was, or to vouch for my sons and my sons' sons when the great day of restoration shall come, although it was not without much difficulty the officials would allow me to retain it. Then with laborious travel I returned to Pegu, and being desirous of seeing my dear native land again, took ship for Goa, and so to Lisbon, where I was held by the Bloody Inquisition, but being freed in course of time, came overland unto France, whence I procured shipping for Southampton. Here I landed in the August of 1656, after an absence of twelve years and returned to our Castle of Saltwode, where I write this in the year of grace 1660. Of the seal and other things you shall see in the letters which are with this.

That was the contents of Grand-father Roger's letter. He speaks of *letters* but we never knew of more than one. Amongst our family treasures, though, we have still the great seal of the Ming Emperors, a great square block of jade with a quaint Lion-like animal on the top to act as a handle. The underside is engraved in high relief with old Chinese square characters, and when I first saw it, after over 150 years

from the time it had been last used, there was still clinging to it in the deeply cut crevices some of the vermilion paste used by the Chinese in sealing their documents. But in the same packet as the original letter I have just quoted is another in Chinese, and a translation, dated 1867, written by the Abbot of the Monastery of Jumlam-po in Thibet enquiring as to the Great Seal, and notifying the then "lord of Saltwode" that a descendant of the Imperial Mings was still waiting his opportunity to recover the ancient throne, and that the Taiping Rebellion which was then in progress might unseat the Manchus, in which case, should the Ming Prince be able to seize his inheritance, the ancient seal would be required and the descendants of Roger Saltwode might ask what they would in recognition of their ancestor's great services in preserving the life of the Emperor Yu Yuen, and thus the succession of the old Imperial House. It is a matter of history that the Taiping Rebellion was crushed, and the Manchus retained their throne, nor can I trace that any answer was sent to the Abbot beyond the assurance that the Seal was safe and that if it was required, a descendant of Roger Saltwode would deliver it back into the hands of its rightful possessor in his palace at Peking.

And that was where the affair rested, when I came out to China in 1904, being appointed to the British Legation in Peking as Naval Attaché. At the same time my young brother Joseph, who is also of a roaming disposition, went to Japan and settled there for a time in Yokohama.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

The train drew into Hiranuma Station at six o'clock in the morning. My young brother was on the platform waiting for me, having heroically accomplished the drive from Yokohama in the early hours, and now stood beaming with smiles as we shook hands. I am afraid I presented a sorry object after my weary journey from Shimonoseki, grimy and unshorn, a contrast to his immaculate white suit and well-groomed appearance. Having delivered my baggage to the coolies, we set out for the Bluff, walking, as we had not met for three years and had plenty to say to each other and the day was yet cool. It was not, however, until I had bathed and changed and we sat at breakfast in his shady verandah, that he gave me some news which greatly interested me and put me into quite a flutter of excitement. As for Joe, he gave it in the most matter of fact way, sitting there gravely sipping his coffee. I can see him yet looking brown and well, with the breakfast table before him and the drooping wisteria behind. He is not good-looking, none of my family are amongst the males, but there is an appearance of power and assurance in his brown eyes which is very pleasing and makes one place reliance and confidence in him at first sight. His hands are lean and capable, aristocratic hands, such as befits my father's son.

"You know, old man" he said, "I had a visit from a Chinaman about a week ago, it was about the adventure of old great-grandfather Roger out here he came about. It was hundreds of years of ago, you know more about it than I do."

"You don't mean to say so?" said I, intensely interested at once. "Tell me all about it, my dear boy, you know I always was a firm believer in the story."

"That is one of the reasons I am glad you came over to Japan for your holiday" he smiled, and the look in his eyes plainly that was not the only reason, whereat I smiled back and nodded. "Well, as I see you are anxious to hear about it," he went on, "I won't try your patience longer than I can help, The old fellow who came to see me said he was a tailor from Tom & Co., who makes my things sometimes. As he was shewing me some patterns he suddenly asked in excellent English if I was a descendant of Roger de Saltwode who took such a prominent part in the Ming fiasco. I told him I was, feeling rather surprised and a bit amused. He asked if he could see me privately that evening, so of course I consented and told him to come up after dinner. He appeared about ten o'clock, and informed me I was my father's second son and my elder brother was Naval Attaché in Peking."

"He was well-informed" I interrupted, "but I wonder why he did not come to me in China instead of to you in Japan, especially as I am the elder?"

"I'm coming to that" said Joe "I asked him that very question, whereon he pointed out what your more naval than diplomatic brain has failed to discern, that I, as a civilian, could be approached in the matter; he came about, but that Sir Humphrey Saltwood was for the time being a diplomat and therefore out of reach for his present purposes."

"Ah, quite so" said I.

"Well, he spun me a long yarn about the present political situation in China. I was never much interested in that kind of thing, but I understand the Empress-Dowager runs the show and the reigning Emperor is a weakling. The idea is to upset the present Dynasty and replace the descendant of the Ming Emperors on his ancestral throne, and a lot more rot. From what I could make out, if the plot is successful we stand to come in for something worth having, and they want that big jade seal back."

"Your description of the interview, if sketchy, is at least to the point," I said. "Do you think I could see this old fellow? I am not a diplomatic personage at the moment, you know!"

"Nothing easier, I'll send for him at once."

"Do, my dear boy" said I. "I want to run across and see the Brightdales, you might as well come along with me, the Chinaman can wait if he's here before we are back, and I always go and see my old friends so soon as I can when I come to this place."

We accordingly called for rickshas and passed a very pleasant morning with the Brightdales, recalling old times, and got back to Joe's bungalow about an hour before tiffin time. We found the Chinaman waiting for us and whilst Joe mixed the cocktails, (he *can* mix cocktails), I examined our visitor with some eagerness. He had greeted me courteously and with much dignity, a tall man about fifty years of age, with scanty beard and moustache and a pleasant intellectual face.

"I may be permitted to guess" I began politely, "that you are no tailor?"

"Sir Humphrey has excellent discrimination" he replied in perfect English. "I am Lin Chen Si, an adherent of the House of Ming and descended from an old Chinese family who held high office under the ancient régime, two hundred and seventy years ago."

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lin" I said, "and had I known I should have asked you to be seated before. You will join my brother and me in a drink? No? Then at least we have your good wishes in the toast 'Success to our plans.'"

"Or 'plot'" said Joe, and Lin bowed and smiled whilst we drank the cocktails. Then we lighted our pipes whilst Lin smoked a cigarette and I settled myself comfortably to take part in a conversation which I promised myself would be most interesting. And so it was.

"Although" I said, "I am attached to the Peking Legation, for the moment I am on leave and should like

to hear what you propose. My brother at any rate will take action if practicable " (here Joe lifted his eyebrows) "and I may tell you, Mr. Lin, I have studied my ancestor's account of the destruction of the Ming Empire somewhat closely and am deeply interested in the subject. Do I understand that an Imperial Ming is still living? "

"Indeed, yes" replied Lin, "a fine young prince and a promising. His name is Lien, he is twenty years old, has been well educated in modern science as well as in our classic literature, and should he be seated on the throne of his forefathers I am sanguine that China will tread in the footsteps of this great Japan and be a power in the world."

"Sounds all right" said Joe, "but let us hear the whole yarn and what you want us to do, Mr. Lin."

"Yes, and what your people are going to do too " I added.

"I ask nothing better" said Lin. "I do not ask your secrecy because when I reflect on the great future that lies before you if our plans are successful, I consider that unnecessary. Also, you are English Gentlemen. I will start then at the beginning. In 1884 Chao Ehr Ming died in the Monastery of Jumlambo in Thibet, the lineal descendant of the last Ming Emperor of Cathay, he to whom your ancestor Roger was chief advisor. A month before he died the young prince Lien was born, in his own right now Emperor of China. In sketching his early years it suffices to say

that he was instructed in all the arts he would be likely to require if he ever ascended the throne, an event to which political happenings seemed to be trending even then. That the time is now ripe is apparent. The Manchu Emperor, Kiang-hsu, in 1898 tried, in a moment of enlightenment, to ameliorate the condition of things in his country. As you know this attempt was followed by a Coup d'Etat and his imprisonment by the Empress-Dowager, who objected to the proposed reforms as they would take all her power away. The old conservative régime again came into power, and was in 1900 followed by the Boxer Rising and the subsequent occupation of North China by a body of International Troops. After affairs had been settled, the Court returned to Peking in 1902, and has ever since been pursuing its reactionary course. The feelings of all true Chinamen, seeing their country going to the dogs and their native soil occupied by Foreign Troops, are better to be imagined than described. So the Ming Party at last decided that the time was come to restore the old Line, if the gods willed it, and by an enlightened rule, try to pull China out of the mire into which she has fallen. This we would effect by another Coup d'Etat, a Palace Revolution. But we want competent advice, we want a guiding hand to our inexperience. Who so fitted to give this, we asked ourselves, as the sons of our ancient Emperor's friend, now long dead? Better still, they are at hand, one in China and the other in Japan, and so I came to you."

Lin ceased suddenly. His eyes had been alight as he harangued us, and I felt how deeply he had at heart his cause and the salvation of his country. He now sat passively, in Oriental calm, waiting for one of us to speak.

"It is true" I said at last, reflectively, "that the Chinese are tired of their Manchu rulers. It is also too true, alas, that China is going backward instead of forward. If report speaks truly, one or two of the great Viceroys—

"Hush" said Lin, "let us not mention their names here. The time will come when we must take this into consideration. But at present, the question is, will *you* help? Will you come to China?"

"I shall be back in Peking in September" I answered, "but my diplomatic—

"Look here," interrupted Joe, "it sounds all very fine and it will be an experience anyway. I've two months' leave due me, I can go across with old Humphrey here when he goes and then—and then—by George, I'm getting quite keen about it. What do you say, old man?"

I smiled. "I thought we should have you fired sooner or later, Joe. Personally I think it is worth trying. If we succeed the results will be splendid, and if we fail—well—we will hope to cover our tracks."

"We shall not fail" said Lin.

"I like your spirit, Mr. Lin" said Joe. "I believe we'll do it, and in any case I'll go over to China."

"Our intuition was right," said Lin, "we felt sure you would not fail us. There is some fate which links the destinies of Ming and your own house. I will tell you, if I may, the present position."

"Of course" I said.

"I can begin well," Lin went on. "We have an army at our back."

"Eh?" I questioned. I pondered a little. Then—"You don't mean, is it possible that—" and I lapsed into silence as an astonishing idea dawned in my mind.

"What is it?" asked Joe, "what's all the mystery?"

I looked at Lin. "Tell me whose army it is."

He leaned forward and whispered impressively in our ears, "That of Wan Hsi Kei, Viceroy of Chih-lin."

I drew a long breath. "The Viceroy is a Chinaman too and no Manchu" I thought to myself. Then I said to Joe, "I've not been in China for nothing, my boy. It will be quite worth your while spending your two months leave over there with me. Wan Hsi Kei, by Jove! The most go-ahead man in China!"

Lin was radiant. "I am so glad you think like that," he said. "I will drink wine with you now if I may. To our meeting in Peking!"

"In Peking!" we repeated as we drained our bumpers.

CHAPTER II.

THE VICEROY'S PLANS.

"Dan" I called.

"Sir?" Dan is always on the spot. I ought perhaps to tell you all about Dan as he is a rather important personage in this story. He was born on the Estate about a year before I was and has always been attached to me. In our youthful days, on which Dan must look back with intense horror, we did the most unconventional things. I remember once putting a lump of sugar into the Dowager's tea, Dan conniving in his official capacity, and I am sure it still lies heavily on his matured conscience. When I was sent to school and afterwards to the "Britannia" Dan went to school too, and then helped on his father's farm. After a few years of sea-faring, I secured the first of a succession of diplomatic billets, more from family influence than ability, and Dan, as a matter of course, came with me to Berlin, Madrid and then to Peking as my body servant. I break out occasionally, but Dan, having once acquired gravity and wisdom, does not err therefrom, and views my peccadilloes from the standpoint that the King can do no wrong, if a trifle eccentric at times. Only once—but everything in its proper place.

He stood before me in my young brother's smoking room in his immaculate white suit. "Dan" said I, "get this telegram sent off for me, will you? It is to Saltwood, to my mother."

"Very well, Sir Humphrey." When Dan "Sir Humphrey's" me I always know I have done something, or else that he is on his dignity. So I said.

"What's the matter, Dan?"

"You may well ask, Master Humphrey" he relapsed into the colloquial, "of all the scandalous things I ever saw!"

"Dear me, Dan, nothing serious, I hope?"

"When I go for my morning bath and find the whole establishment, male and female, about to get into or having get into the same boiling hot tub, when the cook cooks the dinner dressed in a string and nothing else"—Dan commenced to warm up and his voice to get higher—"when the butcher brings the meat—"

"My dear Dan!"

"—and is the cook's uncle—"

"What does it matter—"

"—and the nursemaid's brother, Sir Humphrey I—"

"Oh, run off and send the telegram, Dan" said Joe. "You need not go into my whole domestic economy. What are you wiring about, old fellow?"

"You see, Joe" I said, "we shall probably require the great seal which grandfather Roger commandeered. So I have telegraphed to Mother to have it sent out by rail, *via* Siberia."

"That's wise, and just like you to think of things. Bat!" he called to a little wire-haired Irish Terrier,

"come here, little dorg, don't you wish you had a memory to think of things like my brother?"

"Memory" I reflected, "memory often depends, I think, on the things one has to remember. Perhaps I remember so well because I have only nice things to think of. The memory of places and persons and things that are past seems always sweeter to look back on than the actual experience when one is really there, because the mind likes only to remember the pleasant things and forgets those which are not so. That is why you can look back on times past and so thoroughly enjoy them because the mind is forgetful of the repellant incidents and retains only the sweet and dear memories."

At this Joe sighed dolorously and asked when we might expect to leave for China, hastily explaining that he did not wish to cut my holiday short but that he was anxious for the adventure. So I explained my programme, which was to go on to Karuizawa, climb Asama Yama and "mess around amongst the missionaries" as Joe put it, then to return to Yokohama on route for Hakone and Ashi-no-yu, where I usually go every Summer to bathe in quite unnecessary sulphur baths. This would take up over three weeks, after which we could go over to Peking, giving the great seal ample time to arrive, *via* the Trans-Siberian Railway. I accordingly went up to Karuizawa after two more days' stay with my young brother and had a very enjoyable time there, after which I returned to his hospitable bungalow, where

I was ordered to forego my Hakone plans, and come for a yachting excursion with him to some delightful fishing villages he knew on the coast. I was rather pleased to do this, being fond of sailing, and Joe possessed a natty little clipper of fifteen tons called the "Evadne" in which we whiled away ten days very pleasantly, Dan accompanying us as crew and cook in addition to the usual native functionaries belonging to the boat. So after a very enjoyable holiday, Joe and I, attended by Dan landed in Tientsin on the 15th October, 1908, having previously telegraphed to Lin to let him know our movements.

Arrived in Tientsin we put up at an Hotel in the Victoria Road. Here Lin called on us two days afterwards, having come down from Peking, he explained. We were very pleased to see him again, as he had taken both our fancies, and asked him to dine with us that evening, which he did, proposing to have a talk over matters afterwards, for I was anxious to hear how things were progressing.

However, the interesting conversation did not take place that evening. Instead Lin said the Viceroy wanted to see us, when we should hear all the news and how matters were trending. We gathered enough though to understand that things were in good trim and going satisfactorily.

"When will the Viceroy be ready to see us?" asked Joe.

"So soon as you can go" replied Lin. "I should suggest to-morrow morning."

"That will do nicely" I said. "If you will call for us about ten o'clock we can drive to the Yamen together, or would you rather we met you somewhere else?"

"I will call for you here at ten" said Lin, "and we can drive into the city together. I may have something to tell you by that time".

And so it was settled. I passed rather a restless night, as I was feeling somewhat excited, but Joe turned out next day as fresh as a May morning and ready for anything, as he put it lightly. We had a ride and breakfasted, after which we waited for Lin who arrived sharp to the minute. The carriage was already in waiting, so we started at once and drove through the Japanese Concession into the Chinese part of the town and over the bridges to the Yamen.

Arrived there we were ushered through several courtyards, at the entrance of each of which soldiers were on guard. Joe cast a critical eye on arms and accoutrements and pronounced them good to me, in a whisper. Joe is quite an authority on things martial having gone through the South African campaign with his Cavalry Regiment, where he won his D. S. O. and two medals. I felt it quite a comfort to hear him pass this opinion for I felt we were now thoroughly in for it. We were presently led to a comfortable half European furnished hall, where we took seats and waited for His Excellency. I noted that Lin was treated by the

officials with the utmost respect and diffidence, whilst glances of the greatest curiosity were directed at us. There was also an indefinable feeling that, foreigners though we were, we drew water, which I put down to the reverence the Chinese have for ancestry, knowing as these officials seemed to do somewhat of our history.

After we had waited about three minutes, Wan Hsi Kei, Viceroy of Chih-lin entered. We rose and bowed as he walked up to Lin and greeted him, shewing him much respect. Indeed, through the whole interview Lin seemed to be the superior in rank of the two. Lin then introduced us to him, and we shook hands. Wan Hsi Kei does not speak much English so we carried on the conversation in French, which of necessity I speak passably, but Joe execrably. Lin seemed as much at home there as with English. The Viceroy was a dignified looking Chinaman, with a scraggy beard and long moustaches, somewhat inclined to corpulence. He was simply garbed in the official plum-coloured undress, wearing his round Mandarin's hat with red button and peacock's feather.

"I am happy" began the Viceroy, "to meet the descendants of the Lord Roger, whose memory is a very pleasant one to all loyal Chinamen." He emphasised the "loyal" and we smiled at one another. I took to Wan at once, and so did Joe. He went on, "You have in your possession one of the Great Seals of the Ming Dynasty?"

"Yes" said Joe. "My brother telegraphed to England for it some three weeks ago, and if it has not already arrived it should shortly reach his address in Peking."

"Good" said Wan. "It is very necessary we should have the Great Seal. Let us sit down, and without ceremony I will tell you our present plans. Our friend the—er—Mr. Lin has no doubt told you my attitude in the present business?"

"There can be no doubt of Your Excellency's loyalty" I murmured diplomatically, whereat the Viceroy smiled again.

"I am loyal to my native land and for its good I would do anything. The position is this. As you know, on the 1st of November the Autumn Manoeuvres take place. My Army, that of Chih-lin, will take part in them, and we have evolved the following scheme. When the manoeuvres are over and the foreign attachés have gone away, and the other divisions of the force participating in them have left for their several stations, my men will remain on some good pretext in their camp near the Western Hills, eight miles to the West of Peking. I shall then request an audience of the reigning Emperor, at which as accustomed, the Empress-Dowager will be present. As it is unnecessary to point out to you the Metropolitan Viceroy does not go to the Palace unescorted. I shall have an unusually large escort on this occasion, but under their official robes my attendants will be fully armed. This will be in addition to my special body-guard of soldiers, who number three

hundred men. We shall enter, of course, by the Main Gate of the Palace, that is to say, by the Chien-men Gate. As you may know, all these formalities in China take place in the early morning before daylight, and I think I shall be able to manage that we arrive at the Chien-men about three o'clock. Here is a map of the Forbidden City and surroundings, which if you will look at, you will follow me better. Having passed through the Chien-men, my soldiers will quietly take possession of the Gate, overpowering the Guards."

"If necessary they will of course be silenced effectually?" interrupted Joe.

"We shall not stop at trifles" the Viceroy assured him, whilst Lin smiled. "Then pursuing our route, we shall cross the courts, past the inner gates, at each of which the same procedure will be followed, and the premises secured. The Sovereigns will, as is usual, receive us in the Chien Ching Palace."

"That's the Throne Hall" I explained to Joe in a whisper.

"Once there, we shall take possession of their persons, also the Forbidden City, the approaches to which will be in our hands. At a given hour my soldiers will have left the Western Hills, and by the time we have secured the Palace, all the Gates of Peking should be in their hands. This will be ascertained by signalling from the top of the Chien-men Gate. Our course is then obvious. The Emperor, the Ming Emperor, will be

enthroned at once, and proclaimed, and the announcement made to the Foreign Legations. The Emperor will at once issue an Imperial Edict, stating the reforms and improvements we intend to take effect, which will enlist the sympathies of the Great Powers, and the Revolution will be a "fait accompli."

"It sounds very simple and should succeed" said Joe. "But don't you anticipate some opposition from the rest of the Nation?"

"I have no doubt," replied Wan, "that there will be some provincial risings, but the Chinese as a whole are adverse to the present Manchu Dynasty, and eventually I think the Ming Throne will be established as firmly as ever it was. Besides, the effect of the promises of reforms on the people. Further, we are not entirely ignorant of the sentiments of a few other provincial Governors and Viceroyes. Oh, yes, there will be trouble, but in the end, I think—"

"We know" interjected Lin.

"Yes, we know, success will crown our efforts. But you see, we must have that seal back, the Imperial Edicts must be stamped with the ancient seals."

"My brother and I will go on to Peking this afternoon" said Joe "and if it has arrived we will let you know at once."

"I am going to Peking too" said Lin, "so we will go together."

"We shall be charmed to have your company. Mr. Lin." I said. "I am much impressed with all His

Excellency has said and hope with all my heart we shall succeed."

"Succeed!" returned Joe, "I should jolly well think we should succeed. I am only anxious for the fun to begin."

"You will have all the fun you want, Mr. Saltwood" said Lin, "and perhaps more. But we are detaining the Viceroy".

"Not at all", replied Wan. "I am counting on your company to tiffin. That disposed of, you can catch the afternoon train from the City Station if you are really going to Peking to-day."

"That will do excellently" I said. "I will write a chit to my servant, if I may, telling him to settle up our account and come on with our traps from Tientsin Station."

Which I did, and after tiffin we were driven to the train, reaching Peking the same evening, when we at once proceeded to my quarters. I had a great deal to think about.

CHAPTER III.
HIS MAJESTY'S INTENTIONS.

So soon as we reached my quarters in the Legation we went through the letters which had arrived since my departure. There were none there which could have contained the Great Seal, but there was a slip from the Chinese Post Office saying a registered parcel had arrived for me, so I signed it and told Joe to go to the Post Office and ask for a man called Dixon who would give him the parcel though it was after office hours, on hearing my name. Whilst my young brother went away on this errand I called on the Minister to report my arrival. Sir Denis was pleased to see me back, and, in the course of conversation, mentioned that something had dawned on the political horizon which he was unable to fathom. I thought I could enlighten him a little if I liked, but said nothing. He then told me that Wan Hsi Kei, our Viceroy, had been appointed a Grand Councillor. I gave a start of surprise, as the Viceroy had said nothing about it when we saw him the same afternoon, but made no comment, wondering to myself whether this would affect his position in his army and determined to see Lin about it as soon as possible. I made some excuse to Sir Denis, who wished me to stay to dinner, and got back to my quarters as quickly as I could, where I found Joe waiting for me.

"The seal has arrived all right" were the words he saluted me with, "I've opened the case, but have left the inside wrappers undone till you came in."

"Good," said I, "let's have a look at it." It was the work of a moment to get the silk undone, though the little Mother had taken care to pack it well, and at last the Great Seal lay before us. It was made as I think I have mentioned before, of green jade with a quaint carved lion on the top to use as a handle. The under side was heavily cut in the square archaic Chinese characters and even after these hundreds of years little pieces of red paste still stuck in the deep cuttings between them.

"Rather a complicated process to seal with this thing" remarked Joe turning the seal over and over.

"They do it the same way as they do in Japan with the little stamps," I explained. "You simply press the surface on the moist vermilion and then make the impress on the document."

"Well, I'm glad it's arrived all right" said Joe. "I think if we can have dinner now, I'll turn in afterwards, as I'm feeling rather tired."

"Right you are, old man" I said, "I expect Lin will be along the first thing to-morrow to find out about the seal, and besides I have got some news for him, but that will keep. Boy! get dinner ready."

We were both up early next morning and had only half got through breakfast when Lin was ushered in. He was plainly excited and brimming over with news. First however, I placed the box containing the Great Seal of the Mings in his hands, and he handled it reverently with great delight.

"I am really very glad this has arrived safely" he began "but I have some further tidings for you. The Viceroy has been made a Grand Councillor."

"Is that promotion or otherwise?" asked Joe.

"Oh, promotion of course" replied Lin, "and we are especially glad it has occurred now, as it shews the Authorities have no suspicion of what is going on. Besides it will mean Wan will have to be in Peking and I shall feel easier with him on the spot."

"How will it affect his position with the army?" I enquired.

"It will not affect it at all. Wan is a General as well as a Viceroy and a Grand Councillor, you know."

"I am very glad to hear that" said Joe, who seemed now we were in China to have taken the initiative. "I should like to go with you, Mr. Lin, into certain details which perhaps you will be able to tell me. I want to know how many men we have got and all about their arms and so on."

"Come along with me to my quarters this afternoon and I will show you the whole thing summarised in a few minutes" said Lin. This was agreed to, but before he went Joe had a few more questions to put.

"Would it be indiscreet, Lin" he said, "if I were to enquire whereabouts the Emperor is now?"

"Not at all" replied Lin, "In fact I had wished to tell you about His Majesty's movements. The Emperor left Ghankin on the Yangtsze last night on the way to Shanghai."

"Ah" I said, "things are beginning to move."

"Yes indeed," said Lin. "His Majesty is of course travelling as a private gentleman. Arrived in Shanghai, which he should do to-morrow, he will be met by three of our most trusted councillors, and shown that city. I rather think" went on Lin with a smile, "that he will see Shanghai in a motor car, which I need hardly say is quite a new departure on the part of a Celestial sovereign."

"And which we will take as an augury for the future" interrupted Joe.

"Yes, there will be many changes and reform after reform. Long and weary work, no doubt, but it is what we owe to our country and nobody understands that better than does the Emperor. However, to go on with the Imperial movements. We do not want His Majesty here too soon, so he will remain in Shanghai for about a week and then come on in one of the foreign coast steamers—the *Hangshing* for choice, as I came by her once and she is a comfortable boat. He will be in Tientsin in good time and we shall arrange his movements so that he will walk into the Capital city of New China precisely at the appointed time."

"It seems excellent" I said.

"The stars are fighting for us in their courses" said Lin. "There is a garrison of 3,000 men at Ghankin who are in a highly mutinous state and ready for anything. They have not been paid for months and a promise

of better things has brought the commanders over to our side. They do not exactly know what is in the wind, but any change from their present position would be welcomed, and we can depend on them. Of course it is not much," Lin went on, "but even these little things are useful and encouraging, and 3000 men may be very handy some day." They were.

So in the afternoon we went to Lin's quarters, which were within the Court quarter of the Inner City, close outside the mysterious Purple Forbidden Walls of the Palace enclosure. You must not think of imposing buildings when I speak of the Court quarter, because it is a collection of winding unpaved lanes, with mud and brick huts lining them, and here and there a more imposing entrance leading through several courtyards to the inner precincts of some superior dwelling. It was in such a house that Lin lived, and he gave us a very comfortable tea with toast (tea and hot toast in a Chinese house!) after which he and Joe went through long lists of armaments and statistics which, from my young brother's remarks, seemed satisfactory. I am afraid I took more interest in some superb porcelain which adorned the room than in the dull lists of men and the supplies which were to be the sinews of the effort that was to rehabilitate China. I argued to myself it was just as well I did not take too active a part now, remembering my official position at the British Legation and our Chinese friends seemed to enter into the situation with rare tact and understanding. On the way

back though, my curiosity made a few enquiries from Joe as to the position in which we really stood.

"Everything's first rate" said Joe with animation. "We've a big army at our back and a whole heap of discontented Governors of Provinces and people like that. If the *coup* here is successful and we can hold our own for only a couple of days, I should think the thing is as good as done."

I was much comforted by this speech and on visiting the Club that evening was able to enjoy my usual mug of beer with somewhat of my pristine satisfaction. Joe had told me that there was nothing more to be done until we got the cue from Lin, so I determined to get on as quietly as possible and let things rip, for we were tacitly committed to high treason and murder or whatever the gods might decree in their own good time. The affairs of the Ming Dynasty were in capable hands.

CHAPTER IV.

JOE TAKES THE FIELD.

I ought, perhaps, to have said before that when I was in Japan and realized that we were really in for a big thing, I applied to the Foreign Office and the Admiralty to be relieved of my official position in Peking. I did not much depend upon the emoluments to be derived from a Naval Attaché's post, and the Saltwood revenue was more than enough for my needs and those dependant on me; moreover, if the great undertaking on which we were embarked was going to turn out successfully, I need consider money matters less than ever. I felt rather relieved when, on the day following our expedition to Lin's residence, I received official news of my removal from the position I occupied and with it the name of my successor. So I felt quite satisfied with myself when the same evening I strolled down to the Club with my young brother. There was a crowd of fellows there, as is usual in the evenings, and after I had settled myself down in my accustomed corner, young de Troissac, of the French Legation, came over and sat by me. I always rather liked de Troissac as he was interesting to talk to and well-informed. On this occasion he commented on my brother's sudden interest in the wall of Peking and other antiquities. Indeed since we had been in the Capital, Joe had shewn a great interest in the fortifications and gates. He does not concern himself

about these things as a rule, but with my knowledge of ulterior objects I did not wonder at his newly-acquired interest and had several times accompanied him on his rounds inspecting the great Gates and approaches.

The walls of Peking are of prodigious strength and kept in excellent repair—for China. The great city itself is divided into two by a wall running transversely across the middle and dividing the North and Southern portions into almost equal halves. The Southern portion, known as the Chinese city, is a flat square East and West, whilst the Northern part is rather large and is also a flat square, but running North and South. Within the latter, which is called the Tartar City, is the Imperial City, also surrounded with walls and inside that again the Imperial Purple Forbidden City, with great walls and a moat full of water surrounding it. You will thus see that the mural defences are very strong. The great gates are crowned with high pagoda-like structures with three or four tiers of port-holes like an old line-of-battle ship, but most of the ports are filled with wooden shutters on which are painted the mouths of cannon.

However to return to de Troissac.

The conversation lead to the approaching manœuvres, of which subject everyone was full. "It will be a grand sight" said de Troissac, "there will be something like 100,000 men in the field."

"I hear Wan Hsi Kei's army is the largest of the several detachments" I remarked.

"By far" replied de Troissac. "Has it ever struck you what possibilities lie in Wan's hands? With his present commanding position and power, he could seize Peking and put the whole Imperial Family to death, including the old Empress-Dowager."

"True" said I "but have you considered what he would do after that?"

"Ah, there of course is the difficulty. The Manchu Dynasty is not beloved by the Chinese, naturally, but I hardly think they would welcome Wan as the new Emperor. But still, if he only had a suitable candidate, what an opportunity it would be!"

I thought of the way the excitable Frenchman would look if he only knew what I knew. How nearly chance and wild conjecture sometimes stumble on the truth! for the existence of a descendant of the old Imperial Mings would have appeared to him as a thing highly improbable and not worth giving a thought to.

This kind of conversation was not calculated to soothe my feelings, which are not always under the best control when an urgent crisis is approaching, so I got up and, having found Joe, suggested that we should go home and dress for dinner. He was nothing loath and in five minutes we were back in my quarters. I hate getting into evening dress and never do so unless I have to. After first coming out from home and being stationed in Berlin I did it merely from force of habit, but since Dan's adventures with my studs I have avoided

it as much as possible. I suffer from a chronic inability to preserve the small studs which go in the stiff front of one's dress shirt. Dan used to be provided with dozens for me, but one night he swallowed two in mistake for quinine pills, since then he has given up carrying them, to my great discomfort, as I am consequently often now reduced to using one of those brass paper fasteners with two legs which you can pull out inside and are all right as they do not dig into your flesh. I had just finished this critical part of my toilet when Joe came in and Lin was with him. I was a little startled at this sudden apparition but in answer to my nervous enquiry Lin replied.

"There is nothing the matter, Sir Humphrey. I merely dropped in, passing this way, to tell you that His Majesty left Shanghai last night and may be expected in Tientsin in a couple of days."

"Good" I said, "it is well to have the Emperor handy. When are these manoeuvres?"

"They start on the 9th" replied Lin. "This is the 7th November so that His Majesty will be here when the time comes. The evolutions should be over by the 12th, and immediately after the departure of the different parts of the grand army to the various stations we shall make the *Coup d'Etat*."

"Everything is then perfectly ready?" I questioned.

"As perfectly as we can arrange matters" said Lin. "Wan arrives here to-morrow and will at once

proceed to take up his command. He has already applied for an audience on the 13th after the manœuvres are over and then—”

“Then the fun will commence” struck in Joe. “What’s more, I am going with Wan to-morrow.”

“You will like that” I said, “he’ll show you everything there is to be seen.”

“Not quite in the way you think though, old man. I am going to be disguised as a Chinamen and attend Wan as one of his officers.”

“But how absurd, Joe” I said. “You don’t look like a Chinaman and you can’t speak a word. You will be recognised immediately.”

“Yes, but only by our own entourage” said Lin. “As a matter of fact we want Mr. Saltwood’s experience in helping to lead the attack on the 13th and if he goes with the Grand Councillor now he will be there on the spot and no chance of discovery, whereas it might be rather hard for us to smuggle him out to where we want him afterwards.”

I, of course, saw that Joe would be useful with the attacking force, but still I did not like the idea. You see, I felt responsible for my young brother in a way. After thinking over it for some time I considered that, as the attack was to be a surprise more than a pitched fight, he would probably be in less danger there than in Peking with Wan and his men when seizing the gates of the Palace. So, though somewhat worried, I

assented, not that it mattered whether I assented or not, Joe reminded me. "Besides, old man," he said, "I shall have far more reason to be frightened for your safety than you will for mine."

"Now what on earth do you mean?" I demanded firmly.

"The fact of the matter is, Sir Humphrey" explained Lin, "that even as your brother's experience will be useful in bringing up the rear, as it were, yours will also be invaluable in helping to lead the van."

"It'll be great fun" remarked Joe to me.

All I said was "Oh!" Then Lin continued:

"You see plans are now very far advanced. Arrangements, details of which will be afterwards settled, will be made for you to join Wan and his escort as he is proceeding to the Palace in the early morning."

"Deuced cold job" I murmured, "Peking in the small hours of a late November morning."

"That's only his way" explained Joe to Lin. "He always growls when he has to get up very early in the morning."

Now this was not true, at least not entirely so. I did not so much mind getting up in the middle of the night on this occasion, but when at the end of the expedition lies the fate of a Dynasty you like to think about it a bit. I explained this at some length to Lin, whereat my young brother said:

"There you are, you see, he's as keen as mustard. You could not have a better man for the job. Haven't you heard, Mr. Lin, how at the Seige of—"

"Oh, shut up" I said severely, "We are trying to discuss ways and means." Joe nodded pleasantly and said "Well, wire in."

Two or three fellows were coming to dinner, but we made Lin stay, introducing him as a High Official. Knowing the exigencies of official life, they found nothing extraordinary at the presence of a handsome and dignified Chinaman at a Foreigner's table. After they had gone, which they did expeditiously at a hint from me that I had diplomatic business to transact with my Chinese guest, and apologising for cutting the evening short, we at last found ourselves alone with Lin and discussed arrangements far into the night. It was decided that my young brother should give out that he was going to take a trip to the Ming Tombs, the Nankao Pass and Kalgan, which would be a splendid excuse for his disappearance. He was really, though, to join Wan immediately on his passage through Peking and leave with the retinue for the Western Hills and the Camping Ground. Lin was to proceed at once to Tientsin to wait on the Emperor, but would return to the Capital in time to give me the cue for joining the surprise party on the morning of the 13th. After these things had been discussed over and over again by all of us, especially by myself who was anxious to have no accidents, Lin departed.

The next afternoon some officers of Wan's entourage called and when they had done with Joe I could not have told him from a Chinaman. Most of the young officers had been educated abroad and were thoroughly up-to-date. I felt more confidence as I talked to them the while they were helping my young brother into his Chinese things. One and all were devoted to the Ming Emperor and the cause of the rejuvenation of China. When they were all ready to depart, I took Joe aside for a few minutes, as I wanted to speak with him before he went on what would certainly be an excursion of some danger to both of us.

"How are you armed?" I asked him.

"Couple of six shooters" he said. "If you've any bombs or shells you want me to carry around, my dear old thing, I tell you I'm not going to do it."

"Don't be silly, Joe." I said, "The two revolvers are ample. I only want you to take care of yourself."

"Of course I will, old man" he replied affectionately, "and you look after yourself too. You'll probably see more fighting than I shall."

"Well as to that, my dear boy, we shall see. I must confess I am feeling a little anxious, though I see no reasonable doubt why our plans should not succeed. Now good-bye, my dear fellow, and God bless you."

"Good-bye, old man" said Joe wringing my hand, "next time we meet we shall be all sorts of things with

red buttons and enough feathers sticking in our hats to fly with" and with a merry nod, he joined the young officers, to all of whom I wished adieu and good luck. After mutual hand-shaking they departed and I was left alone with Dan, who was anything but a comforter, as he put the most dolorous aspect on everything.

"I never thought," said he, "I should see Master Joseph go away like that with a lot of heathen Chinese."

"Dan" I said, "there is always a certain amount of anxiety in times like these. I feel a bit humped at my young brother's departure, goodness only knows how and when we shall meet again, so you must not make it worse."

"I'll stick by ye both, Master Humphrey, till the last breath is out of my body and well you knows it" said the honest fellow, and so I shook his hand.

Really, I did feel a bit shakey.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLAN OF ACTION.

On the 11th and 12th of November I went with the Legation parties and Military Attachés to witness the grand Manœuvres. These were held to the westward of Peking between the city and the Hills and embraced an area of some thirty-five miles. One hundred thousand men took part in the display, which was more spectacular than practical, the object of the Manchu Government being more to impress the foreigner with the display rather than with a sense of power underlying staid evolutions. The army was made up of the massed provincial forces of the Viceroy of Chihlin, Wan Hsi Kei, numbering in all nearly 25,000 men and the balance of the troops of the Governors of the five provinces nearest the Metropolitan City. The Chinese Government are lavish in their entertainment of their foreign visitors on these occasions, and the present was no exception to the rule. We were permitted to see everything and as you may suppose I devoted most of my attention to the Chihlin men. These Northerners are a fine lot of men, rather taller and more muscular than the general run of Chinamen. Wan's people also exhibited a much more military appearance than the others and seemed more businesslike in every way besides being better armed. This was encouraging to me, though I knew before of course that Wan had made a name for himself with his innovations and the work-

manlike state of the provincial army. I did not see Joe which was just as well, though I managed to go quite close up to Wan's Headquarters.

The conspiracy was beginning to get on my nerves and I was looking forward for the time when it would be all over and done with. It was therefore with a feeling of relief that I returned to my house early on the 12th and settled down to wait for further developments. I was expecting Lin all day but it was 5 o'clock in the evening when he arrived with two other Chinamen with him. He explained that they were to accompany us and had with them my disguise and all materials necessary for my make up "though there was no need for it to be a very complete one" Lin explained. I sent the two men to my room to get my things ready under Dan's superintendence, and then closeted myself with Lin to hear the final arrangements. As the hour approached I felt stung by the excitement and now that we were to get to action was eager and ready for anything.

"It is just after five," said Lin, "we have about an hour to wait. Meanwhile I've had rather a worrying time and will have a whisky and soda with you, Saltwood, if you do not mind."

"With pleasure. Don't worry, I'll mix them myself, the things are here. Say when. Let us drink to our success. Now, I'm ready to hear everything and do anything."

"I like to hear you talk like that, Saltwood" said Lin. "First then I must tell you His Majesty arrived

all well in Tientsin, and yesterday took train for Fengtai, where he got off and proceeded across country to the Camp. He should now be safely with Wan."

"Good" said I. "Tell me what the Emperor looks like."

"You will see him soon enough" replied Lin, "for we shall meet His Majesty in a few hours. He enters the Palace with us to-night."

"Where are we to join them? Did Wan get his audience granted all right?"

"There was no difficulty about it at all, he is expected at a ceremonial audience at four to-morrow morning, so another nine and a half hours will decide our fate. However, there are now some things I must tell you, and first of all who I am."

"Whatever else you are, you are one of the moving spirits and a brave man," I said politely.

Lin smiled. "The anxiety we moving spirits have to go through is something awful to balance the distinction," he said. "My official rank is that of Prime Minister to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Lien of China, whose reigning name will be 'Glorious Promise.' In civil rank I suppose I rank with one of your English Dukes, but as you know, Chinese distinctions are somewhat intricate, but that we shall amend with other things later. Meanwhile the Emperor has been pleased to create both you and your brother Earls for the time being as an *Aevi Auspiciis melioris*, which as you know means 'a Pledge of Better Things.'"

"I am highly honoured" I responded "and my young brother will feel the same. But at present our sole endeavour is to shew ourselves worthy of the trust and confidence you have reposed in us, of these other things we can talk later."

"Exactly" responded the Duke. "Now, this is the plan of to-night's operations, a night that will go down in history as one of the most famous nights and the most auspicious that has ever closed over China."

"God grant it" I said fervently.

"This then is the plan of action. Yesterday night the last man of the provincial armies left for their several stations. Our own men remained in Camp pending the audience their Commander-in-Chief is to have with Kiang-hsu to-morrow morning. All the foreign attachés and people who would be in the way have likewise gone. Therefore if our plans have gone as we intended, when the Emperor reached the Camp this afternoon he would have found all clear. The army as a whole, though devoted to Wan, does not know of course what is intended. Only a chosen few, amongst whom we must reckon a few provincial Governors and one Southern Viceroy, know exactly what is in the wind. Amongst these are included Wan's personal entourage and the escort which will accompany him to-night. These are all good men and true, specially chosen. Well, the ceremonial procession of the Grand-Councillor will start from the central South Gate of the Chinese City, outside of which we shall have previously joined the party. On

passing through the South Gate our men will seize it and closely confine the Manchu guards. At this early point it is highly important that nobody is allowed to escape and give the alarm. Our men will then hold the gate, and the remainder of the retinue will advance with us up the central road to the Chien-men Gate, which is, as you know, the front door of the Palace. Here the same procedure will be gone through and after that we shall have to do everything as quickly as possible and seize one gate after the other around the Palace enclosure. Whilst this is going on, Wan, the Emperor, you and I with some guards will have penetrated to the Throne Hall and seized the persons of the Manchu Emperor and the old Empress Dowager. You follow me?"

"Perfectly" I said tingling with excitement, "Go on."

"At 4 o'clock this afternoon the Army started its advance on Peking. We should be in possession of the Chien-men gate by 4 a.m. At that hour instructions have been issued under your brother's orders to seize the gates of the city in every direction, for which purpose two hundred men are being sent to each, and five hundred to the An-ting or North Gate. At daylight therefore, the city together with the Imperial Family will be in our possession. The new Emperor will be immediately enthroned and a Proclamation to the Nation issued stating what has occurred, and at the same time a Communiqué will be sent to the Foreign Legations announcing the change of régime with the

reforms and intentions of the restored House of Ming. What do you think of the plan?"

"Couldn't be better" I said. "I am all eagerness to begin."

"You have a certain amount of fighting experience, Saltwood," went on Lin, "and will take command of the armed escort outside the South Gate before it is seized."

"I shall to my best."

"I shall be at your side all the time and will translate your orders into Chinese without question as they are given."

"Good. That will do excellently."

"Well, now go and get ready. You will find my men good at dressing you. It is needless for me to tell you to go armed."

"I shall take two revolvers."

"And there is a keen sword attached to your uniform" said Lin. "Now I shall try and get half an hour's rest whilst you get ready."

The Duke came into my bedroom with me and lay down on the bed, closing his eyes. Dan, also garbed in Chinese clothing, and the assistants, were ready, and whilst I was undressing I told Dan exactly what was happening and told him his station was close at my side. Dan is a great stickler for etiquette so I told him I and Joe had both been created Earls, whereat he was much impressed and kissed my hand as he murmured his congratulations.

I was in no need for ceremony then. I was only anxious to get into my Chinese uniform and be off. The clothes were loose but light and serviceable and would not be in the way when on, but I experienced some difficulty in getting into them.

"Hand me that belt, Dan" I said.

"Here, my lord Earl" said Dan impressively.

"Earl be damned" rapped out I, "where are my trousers?"

"Here you are, Sir" said one of the Chinamen, and took me into their hands whereby I was made ready in less than ten minutes. I put a Tom Brown equipment over the tunic and the revolvers were in holsters at my side. The sword I hitched up close to my waist.

"All ready now, Duke" I said shaking Lin's shoulder. He got up at once and after giving a few instructions to the Chinese said to me:

"Come along, we are going in sedan chairs which are waiting for us." We followed him out and in my small front garden five chairs and bearers waited for us. Before getting into mine I said to Lin:

"Where are we bound?"

"To outside the South Gate" he replied. "There is no time to lose, get in and hurry."

So in I got and following Lin's chair which was borne along in front of me, and with Dan and the two attendants behind, we were trundled away through the Chinese city southwards.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT AT THE SOUTH GATE.

We were carried through the Water Gate and shortly afterwards left the badly paved road and were carted across country, for the major part of the Chinese city within the walls is nothing more or less than country with scattered houses, once you are away from the main thoroughfares. We had gone about a mile when I heard a burst of hearty Saxon profanity from astern, and looking out to investigate, found that Dan and his chair had become entangled in something and had been dropped into a ditch. We all got out of our chairs whilst things were rectified and I rebuked Dan for his want of prudence in using such language whilst on such an adventure, especially as he was disguised in Chinese clothes too, moreover I object to swearing. Apart from this little interruption our progress was uneventful and at about half-past nine we had skirted the eastern confines of the Temple of Heaven Grounds and had emerged from the city by passing through the walls at the new gate cut for the passage of the railway. It was exceedingly jolty going and once I was thrown violently to the side of the chair and my revolvers made their impression on my side, whereat I sang out lustily, and Dan in a very annoying way made the whole cavalcade halt till he had investigated what was the matter with his beloved master.

"I'm all right, Dan" I said "only fell over on a projection and it hurt, so I sang out."

"From the language you used, Sir Humphrey" replied Dan with dignity "I thought something dreadful had happened, so I got out to investigate. I am very sorry."

Vengeance having been thus repaid, our course was resumed. I thought we should never get to where we were going, and it was nearly eleven o'clock before we came to a final halt. We all got out and found ourselves in front of an old Chinese Inn. Looking to the North I saw the great roof of the Yung-ting or South Gate projecting over the trees about a mile away from us. The Inn was lit up and a tall man was standing in the doorway. He hastened forward and helped Lin to alight and I recognised the Viceroy Wan, Grand Councillor of the Empire. They both came up to me at once and enquired how I was and on receiving a satisfactory answer turned and led the way into the inn. At a sign from the Duke I waited in an ante-room, whilst they entered a larger room beyond from whence I could hear the sound of cautious conversation. In about ten minutes Wan emerged and coming up to me, said,

"The Emperor wishes to see you, my lord, if you are ready."

"I am perfectly at your service" I replied and followed him into the inner room.

Lin was standing near the figure of a young man garbed in the uniform of a subordinate Chinese officer.

The young officer was studying a folding map, which he laid aside as I entered and advanced towards me.

"This is Sir Humphrey Saltwood, Your Majesty" said Lin.

I bowed low and then came up to a naval salute. The young Emperor came close up to me and took both my hands in his whilst he looked straight into my eyes. I saw a pleasing intellectual face, typically Chinese. The hair was worn short in European fashion and the expression of dignity round the brow was unmistakeable. We must have looked into each other's eyes for at least a minute, then I said instinctively, "God save Your Majesty."

"I thank you, my lord," the Emperor replied in English in a high clear voice. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to meet you. I had nearly said 'meet you again' for the services your ancestor rendered to mine make us old friends—"

"—and myself Your Majesty's trusty faithful servant" I interrupted. The Prince smiled. "My Prime Minister, my old tutor and dear friend here" he said nodding towards Lin "has told you that we have created both you and your brother dignitaries of the Empire. That is nothing to what our intentions with regard to you are."

"But, Sire" I answered, "my brother and I wish to do nothing but our duty, which is the more pleasing by reason of the traditions we go on. After the work

is done, then let us speak of rewards if it be still Your Majesty's pleasure."

"It will be our great pleasure" said the Prince pressing my hands and releasing them, for he had held them all this time. "And now to business. You are doubtless well acquainted with the precincts of the Palace?"

"Hardly well acquainted, Sire. I have been to the Throne Room in the train of the Minister two or three times when audience has been granted, but that is the extent of my knowledge of the interior of the Forbidden City."

"It is well" said the Emperor. "I, though I have never been within my ancestral portals know well from plans all its turnings, and I shall bear my share of the guiding, ay, and any fighting there is to do too."

"Your Majesty is a Prince such as one loves to serve" said Lin with devotion lighting up his face, and I make no doubt I shewed the same sentiment for, from what I had seen of Lien, he had my hearty approval.

"But time flies" continued the Emperor. "It is nearing midnight. You, Sir Humphrey, will take command of the attack, being experienced in such matters. The Viceroy of Chihlin enters into audience with my—my Cousin of Manchuria with a train of three hundred and fifty men, of whom you are the Commander. I myself act for the time being as your lieutenant. Our men are handy and wait but the word to advance. The

Audience is fixed for four o'clock, at 2.30 we shall start from here."

"That will give us plenty of time to seize the Yungting and traverse the south part of the City to the Chien-men" I remarked. "If I have Your Matesty's permission I will lie down and rest a little and will think over a few details of our attack".

"Of course, my dear lord" replied Lien. "I will arouse you in good time in case you sleep, which I should advise you to try to do. For myself I cannot sleep, nor will I until I sit upon the Dragon Throne, or lie beneath it".

"Think of nothing but what is auspicious, Sire" I said. I saluted, bowed and backed from the presence. Outside I found Dan who with characteristic energy had secured the best chamber in the Inn for my convenience. Here I lay down on a hard bed and gave myself over to thought. I turned over every possible contingency in my mind and from whatever side I looked at it, the longer I did so felt the surer of success. And thinking it over I dropped off to sleep.

* * *

I was aroused by a gentle shaking of my shoulder. "Quarter past two, my lord" said the Emperor's voice. I sprang up, wide awake at once and tingling with excitement now that the time had come.

"Good, Sire" I said.

"I am now but your obedient Lieutenant" said Lien sweetly.

I nodded. "Then we will get ready to start, Lieutenant. Get the men ready and I will see if the Grand Councillor and Lin are prepared."

My Lieutenant bustled off. I liked that young man, he wasted no time. I then at once went to the big room where I had left Lin and Wan, stumbling over Dan on the way who was asleep near my doorway.

"Come along, Dan" I said. We both entered the big room together and found the two high dignitaries getting ready. I had a last good look at the folding map which lay on a table. Presently my Lieutenant entered the room, saluted and said,

"Their Excellencies' chairs are in attendance, my lord."

"The escort?"

"Is waiting also."

"Good. Your Excellencies' chairs are waiting."

Lin saw our attitudes and smiled. "I am an old man" he said "or I should not want my chair even so far as I shall take it, which will be to within two hundred yards of the Gate. There I shall get out and walk with the retinue, close to your side, Saltwood."

"Sir Humphrey will then have two good interpreters" said the Emperor.

Lin looked at him affectionately. "I pray" said he "all this will end well. China cannot afford to lose you, my dear pupil."

I was afraid if they began to get sentimental they would lose too much time, so I ceremoniously led Lin

to his chair, Wan following. My Lieutenant had darted out in advance and put the escort to attention as we emerged. The two nobles bestowed in their chairs, I motioned to Lien, who gave an order in Chinese, the chairs were swung up on their bearers' shoulders, the soldiers of the escort fell in behind and we were off. I inspected them narrowly as they moved before me.

"Do they know *who* you are?" I asked Lien motioning to the soldiery.

"Only the officers" he replied. "The others think I am a young officer educated in Europe, but of distinguished abilities for this kind of work!"

We had no further conversation, but proceeded in an orderly way towards the South Gate. When the high curved roof had loomed close over us, Lin's chair stopped and he got out. The chair and its bearers turned back the way we had come, and Lin took up his position close to me. Before starting the cavalcade, I gave my instructions for the seizure of the South Gate, which were transmitted to the officers by Lin and my Lieutenant.

"The Viceroy's chair will of course go through first." I said. "The escort will then follow on, all but thirty men, who will halt in the archway and seize any soldiers who may be on guard. They will disarm and gag them, taking care that none escape. As quietly as possible and without any unnecessary hurry the upper stories of the gate must then be secured. I shall remain behind until this is done, but let the chair and its bearers with the

remainder of the retinue proceed as if nothing had happened. Their pace is not very fast and we shall easily be able to overtake them. I will see to this part of the affair myself. You, Lin, remain with me to translate any orders I may have to give". Then I said to my Lieutenant. "You will go on with the escort and the same procedure must be gone through at the Chien-men, but after that hurry - hurry. I tell you this in case of accidents, and in case we may be stopped, but that I do not anticipate. I am thoroughly understood?"

"Perfectly."

"Then give orders for the escort and chair to advance."

We were at once in motion again. The approach to the Yung-ting Men is a rough country road with a few scattered hovels and cook-shops scattered about. At this early hour of the morning everybody was inside and only a light or two shewed shining dimly from behind windows of thinned oyster shells. We drew nearer and nearer to the Gate, whose great bulk towered up over us in a threatening way. One does not enter by the gates on a straight course, as outside the great gate is built around by a wall embracing three sides of a square which abuts on the main wall. We accordingly steered to the left and passing through the small outer gate, which was unguarded, found ourselves inside a large dim quadrangle with the main gate yawning in the centre of the wall of the Chinese City to the north. There was a flitting of lights here and a bustle of soldiers

hastily forming up to salute the passing Councillor. I and Lin dropped out of the line of the escort directly we entered the quadrangle, and watched the chair and the head of our column vanish in the shadows of the great gate between the lines of Manchu soldiers, whose weapons had gone smartly to the "present" as the great men passed, an attitude which they preserved whilst the whole train was passing. Lin and I fell in where a small gap shewed our special detachment of thirty men began, and advanced within the line to the gate. As we approached I rapidly counted up the guard of honour. So far as I could make out there were eleven a side, that meant twenty two and two officers say, twenty four. We had ample force, thank goodness. Lin and I passed under the frowning arch of the gate and as we came alongside the end men of the guard I said "Now." Lin sang out something in a sharp voice, and instantly our men throw themselves each on one of the enemy. The manoeuvre was so unexpected, so undreamt of, that they were speechless with amazement, and helpless. In a few seconds each man was bound and gagged with the ropes and rags I had been careful to see every man of the escort, including Lin, the Emperor and Wan himself, were provided with. Leaving three men on guard over the confiscated weapons, the rest following me rapidly, I ran up a dark stairway built in the thickness of the gate to the left and reached the upper story. There were only seven men here, unarmed and half asleep and it took even less time to secure them also.

"Carry all the prisoners up here" I whispered to Lin "and we will leave them under guard. Conceal the arms in this small room leading off here, and put a guard over them too. We will leave twenty men behind to hold the tower."

"Yes" said Lin and hurriedly issued an order. Our men at once began carrying the prisoners up and laying them in a row along the side walls. The arms were then brought up and bestowed as I had directed, and a guard of twenty men including one signaller and a sergeant in command were left in charge of the South Gate. The signallers of the attacking force were all provided with Morse lamps for signalling proposes, by day they would use the wagging flags they carried.

"Do they understand? Is everything in order?" I asked Lin, who spoke for a minute to the sergeant and then said to me.

"It is all right, we can safely go on now. The man understands what he has to do perfectly. In any case part of the main army detailed to occupy this gate will be here at four o'clock. Let us hurry on."

We ran down the winding steps and leaving the shadow of the gate hurried quickly up the main road which leads straight as a die through the centre of the Southern City to the Chien-men Gate, accompanied by our ten remaining men. In ten minutes we had come up with the main body and pressing to the front we communicated our good news to the Emperor and the Grand Councillor.

"All goes well, so far, thank God," I remarked to my Lieutenant when we had resumed our former positions.

"Yes, but the next will be more of a rush" he replied.

"There is no doubt of that" I said. "After the Chien-men we shall have to seize no fewer than three more gates within the Palace enclosure in quick succession. Detail fifty men for the Chien-men—the rear fifty as we pass through, and twenty for each of the others. Tell off an officer also to be in charge of each gate after its capture and to superintend the seizure and the security of the prisoners." Then I said in an aside to the Emperor "I feel like an Admiral of the Fleet—I mean, a Field Marshall, at least."

"As you shall be, my Lord" he replied gravely. "Promise what you like to these brave fellows if they carry out your orders successfully, I will regard your promises as mine own."

We passed the Temple of Heaven rising its great triple crowned pavilion on the right, and the dark enclosure of the Temple of Agriculture on the left. As these dropped behind we crossed a stone bridge and the houses of the Chinese City began to close round us, built close along the side of the main road. Here I dropped to the rear, and personally saw to it that the rear fifty men understood about the Chien-men Gate, and the next rear twenties as to the other gates. In case of any interruption in the Courts lying between the Gates I

appointed two officers to take twenty men from further up the line, and indeed divided the rest of the escort in bands of twenty each so that I could detach that number for special duty at any moment. This done I saw we were nearing the Chien-men and the critical part of our adventure was beginning. The round-about system of approaches is the same at the Chien-men as at the South Gate, but here a central gate is also pierced in the outer quadrangle wall, which is thrown open on great occasions, such as when the Emperor passes out to worship at the Temple of Heaven. On this occasion, as a special honour, the central outer portal was wide open, which I saw as we crossed the marble bridge in front of it. Like the South gate, the outer approach was unguarded, and the Councillor's chair was already entering the great arch of the Chien-men. I signalled to the officer of the fifty to be ready.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FORBIDDEN CITY.

I glanced at the watch on my wrist and saw it was half-past three. In half an hour more the armed parties detailed to each gate of the city should have done their work. It but remained now for us to get possession of the Palace, which once done, I could communicate by flash light with the Anting or North Gate, where Joe would be.

Our train was quietly passing through the Chien Men where a large Guard of Honour was drawn up. I found afterwards that there were at least one hundred men there. Everything now depended on our striking quickly. Lin and I entered the archway at the head of our rear fifty and as before, when in line with the last man of the Manchu Guard I gave the word "Now." Lin issued a sharp order and our men tackled each one his man. Again surprise paralyzed the enemy for the moment and a large number were disarmed before they quite understood that was happening. I had now to act with speed.

"Cover the men" I shouted in my excitement, but Lin had a cool head and as soon as the English words were out of my lips he had turned them into the colloquial. "Tell 'em if a man moves he is as good as dead."

My men held the advantage of the position and those of the Manchu soldiery who were yet armed,

to the number perhaps of sixty, were confronted with their levelled barrels. An officer at the end of the line who was evidently in command of the Guard chose this moment to turn and tried to run out of the gateway towards the Palace. My revolver was drawn and in a moment I had sent a shot after him. It missed and the splatter of lead striking the stone wall showed on the sides. I fired again and got him in the back. He fell on his face and shuddered for a moment. Lin rushed up to secure him, but found it was unnecessary. This was the first life lost in the adventure. I had been sorry to shoot for fear of the noise carrying the alarm on in front, which it doubtless would have done, only at the moment I heard the scuffle as our people turned on the Guards at the First Gate of the Palace. Had they only known what to do, the Manchus would have had us at the Chien Men, but they have very little courage and no initiative of their own, whereas my men were determined and knew that failure meant—well, failure. Besides this they had been well trained and were picked men. The position, outnumbered as we were and critical as it seemed, was not really so at the moment and we did not give them much time to think. Whilst forty of our men covered the enemy with their rifles, the remaining ten with Lin and myself rapidly disarmed them and piled their arms inside the gate in a heap.

“Tell them to get upstairs into the gate house” I directed; and with Lin’s help they were speedily

bestowed there looking very frightened, for they could have had no idea of our force or what these things forbode.

"Leave the whole fifty men here to guard the Gate" I ordered. "Close the gates and conceal these rifles where you can. I must get on at once. Come, Lin."

We left the Chien Men under the charge of one of the Chinese officers. One could not be too particular then, we had to trust a good deal to luck. Still I felt confidence in the men and the knowledge of their own desperate position doubtless spurred them and sharpened their wits. In any case a trained man was a good deal better than any number of untrained Manchu rabble. Lin and I went at a run across the public street which crosses the inside of the entrance and rushed up towards the First Gate between the stone pallsadings which are the beginning of those divisions which screen off the Forbidden City from the rest of Peking. We found the First Gate already in the hands of our men and after a few hurried directions I flew on with Lin, whose activity was remarkable, to the Second Gate. We were now fairly inside the Forbidden enclosure. As we reached this gate we found the fight in full progress. At this stage fortunately the Manchu soldiery were only armed with the ceremonial spears and bows and arrows which take the place of modern arms in China, as in England, the nearer you approach the person of Royalty, so that although the noise of the struggle was consider-

able, there were no alarming gun shots ringing out. My blood was now up what with excitement and our success so far and I rushed forward and sprang into the fray. The fight was soon over, surprise as ever was our ally, and we had the advantage of knowing what was happening whilst the Manchus had no idea. So soon therefore as I saw our people were getting the best of it I went on as quickly as possible with Lin to the Third and last Gate where a fight was also going on.

I caught a glimpse, over the heads of the struggling crowd, of the Courtyard which lay within the Gate. At the far end was the Throne Hall, and a sea of heads of puzzled Mandarins peering at the inexplicable struggle in the gate-way. An expression of vague alarm appeared on their faces, though doubtless sorrow overcame the elder men at the impiety of this tumult within the sacred precincts. I decided now that the time was come to throw concealment to the winds and seconded by Lin ordered our men to use firearms. Those who were fighting, however, were blind with rage so I let them fight it out, as it mattered little how they fought so we gained the gate. Lin and I therefore cuffed and kicked our way through the tumult, and torn and dishevelled at last forced our way into the inner Court.

Things had changed here since I gained my random glance in from outside. My gallant little Lieutenant had taken command in my absence and under his orders the balance of our men who remained unoccupied had cover-

ed the crowd of Mandarins, who cowered helpless, the wildest astonishment and fear written all over their features. The bearers of Wan's chair had dropped it anyhow near the Throne Hall steps, and the Grand Councillor was making his way out with difficulty. His appearance was hailed with sighs of relief by the Mandarins. Having extricated him and got him on his feet somehow, I hastily communicated to him and our Emperor that the outer gates were all in our hands and desired Lin to detail off fifty men at once to seize the two gates to the north of the Palace which form as it were the back gates to the Forbidden City.

Whilst he was hurrying the men off, I directed my Lieutenant to order the Mandarins to go into a building or hall of some sort which stood to the right of the Courtyard. They bundled in expeditiously enough and a guard was set over them. Calling all the remaining officers together, Wan, at my advice, desired them to patrol the whole interior of the Imperial City, disarming all soldiers and allowing no one on any account to leave the enclosure. A guard of fifty-five men was stationed outside the Throne Hall. Having satisfactorily disposed of everything so far, I turned to Wan and Lin and asked what was to be done next as, unless they wanted me, I wished to go back and see after arrangements at the Gates.

"It is just four o'clock" said Wan, "and my audience is due. Come into the Throne Hall with me."

"I think it best you should come too, Saltwood" said Lin. "They may very well have been alarmed inside, and we may want your help."

"Well, let us be quick" I replied. "I have a hundred and one things to see to and cannot feel comfortable until I have personally seen to everything. All sorts of accidents may arise, the number of prisoners at the Gates and elsewhere must be enormous."

"We will be as quick as possible" said Wan. "Come."

Now this takes some time to relate but really it had all happened very quickly. Hardly five minutes had elapsed since I had forced my way through the Inner gate.

We ascended the five stone steps leading to the doors of the Throne Room. Wan went first, then the Emperor, and last came Lin and myself followed by Dan, who true to his orders had stuck to my side the whole time, and indeed had done yeoman service in the fights at the Gates. Now that we were to beard that dreadful old Empress-Dowager in her den I confess I felt a little nervous. However, there was not much time to think and in another moment Wan had unceremoniously opened the doors and strode into the Hall followed quickly by the lot of us. I thought of the fifty odd men we had left outside in the Courtyard and wished I

had left instructions for them to investigate if we were invisible too long, but it was too late now, and Lin had said there would only be a very few people in the Throne Hall itself according to immemorial custom. I consoled myself with this reflection and following the others, suddenly found myself in the presence of Manchu Royalty.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEARDING OF THE EMPRESS.

The Throne Hall is broader than it is long. It is paved with stone flags, and at the further end is a kind of altar of marble on which is erected a screen of finely carved black-wood. The approach to the surface of the altar is by three black-wood staircases of about six steps each, and a railing of the same wood runs round it. Before the carved screen are set thrones, in this case two in number, beautifully carved with dragons wreathed around the backs with eyes of chrysolite. The Hall is of great height, the roof of large timbers heavily gilt and supported by enormous wooden pillars covered in red lacquer and richly arabesqued in gold relief. Behind the Throne and at each corner stand other great pillars of crimson lacquered wood with gold ornamentation of peacocks, lotus lilies and dragons. The space between the pillars behind the throne-altar is hung with a curtain of Imperial Yellow.

Thus as we came through the entrance we suddenly found ourselves standing close before the Throne. Three high-dignitaries of the realm stood ranged before the approaches, and seated in the two chairs on the summit were two figures.

My glance first rested on the Emperor Kuang-hsu. He leaned back negligently in his seat and his face, which wore a bored expression as we entered, lighted a

little with interest as his eyes rested on our disordered figures. He was a man of about thirty years old, I should judge, with a rather pleasing though indefinitely sad face. He was clad in quiet but rich vestments consisting of a kind of skirt of plum coloured silk and a jacket of the imperial colour. On his head was an official hat.

His appearance and passive attitude were strikingly at variance with that of the other occupant of the Dragon Throne.

The Dowager-Empress, as we entered, and she saw the plight we were in, struggled up from her seat and leaning forward, scanned us short-sightedly. Her face was pale, she must have suspected something was wrong for some of the noise outside must have penetrated the thick walls. The red paint on her cheeks and forehead shewed up in a startling way against the rather livid skin which appeared without wrinkles except near the eyes. These flashed with a dangerous light in the fierce old face. Her robes were a glory of embroidery amongst which the yellow predominated. So she stood glaring at us as we advanced slowly to the foot of the throne-altar and there stood.

Indeed, she had something to look at and be surprised at. Fresh from action as we were, our clothes were torn and disordered. Our Emperor was bleeding at the wrist, and as he calmly stood at the foot of the throne he tore a strip of cloth from his tunic and began to bind

it. Lin has his jacket half torn off, and the Viceroy, fresh from his overturned chair, wore his official cap rakishly over his left eye.

"What means this?" The voice came sharply from the figure of the old woman though I could not see her lips moved. There was a tone of suspense, almost fear, in the angry accents.

Viceroy Wan shuffled his feet in an uncomfortable way and was about to say something, when our Emperor replied in his clear calm voice.

"The end."

The Empress suddenly sat back in her seat. Now that she knew she had to face something, she became calm. Addressing one of the officials in attendance she said in deep vibrating tones.

"You shall answer for this with your lives. I do not understand. How have these people entered our presence thus? Do I there recognize the Viceroy of Chihlin? But who are these and—" she suddenly saw I was a Foreigner and again started from her chair pointing at me, "who is that? What means this inauspicious intrusion?" and again she sank back visibly alarmed. The threatening presence of a foreigner in those sacred presinets shewed that indeed some crisis had to be faced.

"I pray your Majesty not to be alarmed." Our Emperor was speaking and all eyes fixed at once on his face. The attendants had become ashy pale and trem-

bled like aspens. "No harm shall come to you, or to you Sire." He bowed gravely to Kuang-hsu. "I am come back into the house of my Ancestors to take back my inheritance and to give to China the glory which is hers of right."

"Ha, treason!" shrilled the Empress. "Guards! Where are my Guards? I will have you torn to pieces. Am I to—"

The quiet voice of the Emperor Kuang-hsu suddenly interrupted her excited tones. "Peace, Madame" he said, "of what avails it? No doubt if these people can force their way into our presence thus, they have taken means to secure their retreat safely."

Our Emperor smiled. "There is no retreat now Sire" he said.

"Tell me" questioned Kuang-hsu "who are you and how is it you force your way here frightening the Empress?"

"It is a long story to give in detail" replied Lien, "but I will tell it you in as few words as may be. I am a descendant of the old Imperial House of Ming, their only living representative."

"Liar!" This from the Empress-Dowager.

"Peace, Madame" said Kuang-hsu again and nodded gravely at Lien to continue.

"You thought when under the leadership of gallant Nur-hachu over two hundred years ago that when

you had placed their country under subjection you had also exterminated the last of the old royal House. But that was a mistake. An infant son survived, saved by the ancestor of this brave Englishman here."

The Empress drew a deep breath.

Lien continued. "That child, after infinite pains and hardships the Englishman brought safely to Burmah. The prince grew up and married, since when, hidden in the rocky defiles of Thibet the old reigning house has grown and its mantle descended from father to son until now it rests upon me. Long have our old adherents and councillors watched the course of events in China and the world. More wise than those of thy House, my brother, they saw what was good and that power comes from the West. In that way was I brought up and so would have been my sons and their sons until the time was ripe. But it seemed to us that the time was at last come and I am here to claim my inheritance and place my country in the place which belongs to her. In that you, Sire, have failed."

"I believe all this strange tale you tell me—my brother" said Kuang-hsu. He sighed sadly. "Yes, I have failed. Heaven knows, I tried. I saw what was good for China, I, too, realized that power came from the West and it was the dream of my life to raise this great country even as our island neighbour, following that course, has risen. But it was not to be. Following my dream, not without encouragement" here Kuang-hsu looked at the Viceroy Wan, "I began with reforms, with

the innovations I thought it would be best to commence the new era with. But Fate was too strong for me."

"Fate! Was it Fate?" The old Empress took up the running. "There were stronger things in thy life than Fate, my nephew."

"Even so, Madame."

"You thought to oust me from power, to imprison me belike. But I was too strong for you. You think you have me this time, you shall see. I am yet strong enough to cope with all. Methinks you are somewhat privy to this outrage."

"No, Madame, God forbid."

The old woman frightened me. I whispered to Lien to keep a sharp watch on her.

Then Kuang-hsu asked "What are you going to do with us?"

"I shall ask you both at first to consider yourselves under constraint. But have no fear, nothing shall harm you. For you, Madame, be calm, know the whole Palace is in my hands, its Gates and the Gates of the City also." Thus our Emperor.

I thought to myself this was a little premature, however nothing was to be gained by saying so.

On hearing what Lin said, however, the Empress suddenly shot out of her seat in a livid fury. She backed round it and stood supporting herself by the high carved back, near to the Emperor who had also risen

and stood at the head of one of the short flights of steps. He began to speak:

"If that is so I can say nothing more. Indeed I can scarcely grieve over the loss of a shadow. The life of an Emperor is not a joy. I do not envy you your task, my brother of Ming. Ah, to think it is possible!"

That old woman makes me decidedly uncomfortable. Why is she sidling along towards the figure of the Emperor in that fashion? I long to speak but do not like to interrupt Kuang-hsu. He looks very pale and weary now that he is standing and I think he staggered a little just then. There is that wretched old woman creeping up to him again, she needs keeping an eye on. Suddenly both Lin and I give a shout of warning, or, such is the feeling with which she has inspired us, is it terror? For she raises her hand and now, standing erect, has pushed Kuang-hsu violently from behind. He stands swaying on the upper step for a moment and even as our Emperor rushes forward to catch him, falls, striking his head against the sharp carving of the balustrades. He gives a short cry and lies quite still in Lien's arms. I gaze at his face horror-struck, so deathlike it is, when there is a fiendish chuckle from the back of the altar-throne.

"Seize that old woman" I shout and dash up on to the top of it at the same moment and—nothing. The Empress has disappeared.

It is the work of a moment to fly to the yellow hangings behind the screen and tear them aside. Lin is

at my side. The curtain discloses nothing but a stone wall, carved here and there with peonies.

"Where can she have gone?" I gasp, then "Outside, quick, surround the place, we'll get her yet."

Lin issued a few short orders to our guard, and they had dispersed themselves in a moment. But, alas, the rear of the Throne Hall was thickly encroached on by other Palace buildings, into which the Empress must have passed if indeed she can have gone through the wall. As it was, I dared not risk a search inside the buildings until reinforcements came up, such was our strength and so parlous the position. We had to be content with holding the vantage points and, at present, they alone.

"Keep an eye on the Court" I ordered, "and as far as you can on the surroundings." Lin proceeded to dispose the soldiers to the best advantage and I hurried back into the Throne Hall.

Kuang-hsu still lay unconscious. Our Emperor had laid him down on the stone flags with a cushion for a pillow and was bathing the pale face and the gaping wound with water the Viceroy has procured from somewhere. "Is he alive?" I asked.

"Yes, he lives" replied Lien, "but his head has had a nasty blow. That black-wood carving is heavy and sharp."

I knelt and examined Kuang-hsu attentively. The heavy fall on the wood had lacerated him severely. There was a tremendous bruise along the right side of his

head where the skin was also torn and was bleeding profusely. The breath came in painful gulps even as I looked, for before he had lain quiet as death.

"Poor Emperor!" sighed Lien pitifully.

"Perhaps not so poor" I replied. "I must leave him in your hands, for I must go and see to the defences and signal to the city gates. Will you not leave him, Sire, and come with me? I do not care about leaving you alone here. We have the gates, but the interior of the palace is still the enemy's."

"True," said the Viceroy. "I think Your Majesty had better go with Sir Hunphrey. You can be of little use here, leave him to me and I will do everything that can be done. When you get to the gate, Saltwood, send up anybody if you can find them who understands ambulance work."

"I will" I said. "Now, come Sire, we have lost much time already." With a last look at the prostrate Emperor we hurried from the Throne Hall, through the captured gates, towards the Chien-men. It was now broad daylight, and as we approached the big Gate I saw them wig-wagging with flags from the summit.

"That's good" I said to Lien, "they are signalling towards the North. To our own people, no doubt, who should be safely in possession of the city gates long ere this."

"I hope so" said the Emperor. "But here we are. Let us go up and enquire."

We hastily ascended the steep steps and traversing the upper rooms which occupied the whole floor-area of the gate-house, we reached the balcony where the signalling was going on. The young officer in charge saluted as he saw us and I eagerly enquired the news.

"Every gate visible from here is in our hands, Sir."

"Thank God. Are you in communication with the North Gate?"

"We are signalling there now."

They wig-wagged for an interminable time it seemed to me. At last the officer, reading from his note book in which the signals were docketed, turned to us and read out:

"All the gates in our hands. No casualties. General commanding wishes to get into communication with your Commander."

"That's my brother" I exclaimed joyfully. "Tell him I'm here and to wire away."

Lien explained, and the Chien-men recommenced to exchange signals with the Anting-men. By this means Joe and I were soon appraised of each other's safety. I finished my signalling by saying:

"Come in by the North gate of the Palace as soon as you can. All is well here."

"Will you not tell him to bring in a guard and reinforcements with him?" asked the Emperor.

"Not yet, Sire. Let us first get your communiqué into the hands of the Legations and then we will place

the whole city and palace under martial law. Any premature movement of troops may raise suspicion."

"You know better than I do, but I should suggest Sir Humphrey, you ask your brother to bring reinforcements in at once."

"If you order it, Sire" I replied, "but it will be against my judgment."

"I leave it in your hands, Sir Humphrey."

"Then there is nothing more to be done now, Sire" I said. We left instructions for an ambulance man to be hurried off to the Palace to attend to Kuang-hsu so soon as one could be found. Thither Lien and I at once proceeded to tell the Viceroy and Lin that Peking was in our hands and to enquire after the Emperor's condition. We found him still unconscious, and left him in Dan's charge until a medico arrived.

Our Emperor, the Viceroy, Lin and I then walked across the court-yard to a building opposite to that in which we had imprisoned the mandarins and in which a meal had been prepared for us.

"We will have breakfast" I said, "and those who can may rest. For myself I must meet my brother who will be here shortly. Please tell them, Lin, to look out for him at the North Gate and bring him in here when he arrives."

Lin gave the necessary instructions and we sat down to such a meal as we could make. It was 8 o'clock in the morning of the 14th November.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE THRONE HALL.

I enjoyed my breakfast. Intrigues give you an appetite especially when they seem to be going on successfully. It was a good half hour before we had finished, when Joe came in, guided by one of our men. The instant he saw the edibles he made a dive for them and, whilst sufficiently scandalized that he should behave in this way in His Majesty's presence, a glance at the Emperor reassured me, as he was watching my young brother's proceedings with an amused smile. I attempted to ask a few questions between bites, as it were, but Joe would have none of it. "When I have finished, old man" he spluttered, "you can ask questions till you're blue", so I accordingly let him finish in peace and went to have a look at Kuang-hsu. He was still unconscious, but Dan was sitting by on the watch so I returned to the breakfast pavilion with an easy mind. Joe was just finishing as I entered and greeted me with the words,

"Well, what luck?"

"Excellent so far, Joe" I replied. "The gates of the palace are in our hands, but the Empress Dowager has concealed herself somewhere, after nearly murdering the Emperor."

"What, *our* Emperor?"

"No, thank goodness. But that reminds me, I must present you. Sire, this is my brother Joseph Saltwood."

Lien instantly walked over to him and shook hands heartily. "I congratulate you on the successful termination of your part of the attack, my lord" he said.

When Joe heard himself called "my lord" he gaped, so I nudged him in the ribs and said "Don't stare like that, you fool, you're an Earl."

"Oh, am I?" said Joe. "Nobody told me."

"Never mind that now" said the Emperor, "let us hear what you have done."

Joe then told his tale, which was good news, but hardly exciting. He had left Camp at the scheduled time with his men, who had been detailed off to attack the various gates as arranged. The gates had been occupied without difficulty so far as he knew, in any case signals had been received from all, that they were in our hands, but he had nevertheless sent a messenger to each to get full details and lists of any casualties. Lin displayed an Oriental indifference to casualties so long as the gates were in our hands and said so. "We cannot expect to do this without some accidents" he remarked, and as we appeared to have come off very cheaply so far, I agreed with him.

"But what's this about the other Emperor being nearly murdered?" asked Joe.

"The old lady gave him a shove down the steps of the throne" I explained. "He struck his head in falling on some carving and has been rather badly cut up. He seemed very ill from the first and it may prove more

serious than we thought. Come along over and see him, Dan is looking after him."

"Good old Dan" said Joe. "He's all right I suppose?"

"He is quite unhurt" said the Emperor. "He was close at your brother's side all through and did good service."

This conversation took place as we were walking across the court to the Throne Hall. Kuang-hsu still lay very white and frail looking on the floor but as comfortable as Dan could make him with hangings and cushions. Joe had a good look at him and then said,

"Rather a funny thing the Empress trying to slaughter her own sovereign, wasn't it?"

"That is what has been puzzling me a good deal" said the Emperor.

"I think I can guess at the reason" said Lin. "When Kuang-hsu seemed to recognize the truth of what you said, Sire, and remarked that he quite believed your story, I noticed the Empress gave him a dreadful look. I fancy too from a remark she made that she half suspected that this was another plot to place her in retirement, the way she resented it in 1898 is history. I imagine she does not even now know quite what to think."

"She will know soon enough" said the Emperor. "You have taken every precaution, Saltwood?"

"So far as I can with the number of men at present available, Sire" I replied. Then I said to Joe

"His Majesty rather wished to have a large detachment from your people sent in to the Palace, but I did not think it prudent to give any ground for suspicion until we had got the communiqué to the Legations and the Proclamation to the Nation ready."

"It seems to me" said Joe "that it would be wisest to take steps to preserve what we have already gained with a strong hand. Let me send in a couple of thousand men at once."

"We had better have a consultation as to what is best to be done" remarked Lin.

"Certainly," said the Viceroy. "Whilst you are discussing that matter His Majesty and I will draw up the documents you spoke of, if you, Sire, are ready."

"Yes, of course" said Lien, "the sooner the better. Let us begin them at once. But who is this?"

"This" turned out to be the Red Cross man sent up from the Chien-men Gate. With an obeisance to the Viceroy, he quickly knelt and examined the prostrate figure of Kuang-hsu. Then after a few minutes he said something in Chinese to Wan.

Their faces instantly grew grave. "What is it?" asked Joe and I simultaneously.

"He says that the wound is deep and serious, especially as"—he nodded in the direction of Kuang-hsu—"he is apparently weak through illness."

"You don't mean you think he is going to die?" I questioned anxiously. "Because if that is so, let us

send out into the Legation Quarter at once for a Foreign Doctor—”

“—and give the poor devil a chance for his life” interjected Joe.

“My dear Joseph” I protested, “remember where you are. What do you think, Sire? Shall we send for competent medical aid?”

The Emperor considered for a moment. “The presence of another person in the secret may——” began Lin.

“It is not a question of that” said the Emperor quickly. “If we can save his life we will do so. If you think, Saltwood, that a doctor had better be sent for, please send for one.”

“Your Majesty’s sentiments do you great honour” said Lin quietly, “but I pray you consider the difficulties in the way. This is a matter of the regeneration of China and the future of your Dynasty and the life of the last Emperor of the old line cannot be allowed to stand in the way. If we were to send out for a foreign doctor it would be a thing entirely without precedent, and wonderment would be at once set on foot outside. Also a doctor would be sent for by certain high officials who in this case are not available, if the summons came in any other direction it is impossible to say where things would end. Also if you, Saltwood, or your brother, were to go for a medical man, the idea of one of you coming for a doctor to attend the Emperor would make people think you mad or else you would be taken

to the Minister and questioned. I am afraid a doctor from outside is an impossibility."

"I think what he has said is sound, Sire" I remarked. The Emperor looked pained but acquiesced. "I must be guided by you" he said. "In this crisis I would not rely on my own judgment unadvised."

It was accordingly decided that Kuang-hsu would have to get along as well as he could with the amateur means at our disposal. We plied him with brandy but could not restore him to consciousness. We kept up our efforts for nearly an hour without success and then I said,

"I think it is useless pursuing our efforts longer. Dan here will see to him with the help of this Chinese doctor. We shall be near at hand, the proclamation must be drawn up and we must decide about garrisoning the Palace."

It was obvious that what I said was the only thing to be done. The Emperor and Viceroy with Lin accordingly seated themselves at a table in the Throne Hall, and with paper and pencils in front of them commenced to draw up the documents which would mean so much to the New China to which we hoped the last night's work had given birth. I took Joe out to see the position of our men and discuss what had better be done about reinforcements.

I will not weary you with repeating what we said, as it was a long and arduous discussion of ways and

means and the best way not to arouse suspicion too soon. We eventually decided that at nightfall Joe should return to the outer walls and send in a detachment of one thousand men. This I agreed to on considering that in the interior of the palace there were any number of mandarins, eunuchs and servants wandering about free. For all we know there were secret passages leading out into Peking itself. Of the existence of one secret passage I felt assured, for how otherwise could the Empress Dowager have disappeared as suddenly as she did? Given the probability of secret passages existing, there was nothing to prevent our prisoners from communicating with the outside world whenever they liked, and we felt quite sure that with that terrible old woman at the head of affairs they would not throw away a single chance to thwart our designs. Joe agreed with me that it would be imprudent to make any big movement of troops until night set in. By to-morrow the Proclamation and Communiqué would be ready and then we could shew the change of Dynasty as a *fait accompli*, with the Mings seated on the throne in their Palace upheld by an army—the provincial army of Chih-lin to wit. It was a great oversight on the part of Lin and the Viceroy not to have had the necessary documents ready to issue immediately, I thought, in that case we could have marched our troops in at once and whilst men were wondering, we should be securing our position and lording the roost. However, it was no good thinking of might-have-beens then, we had done a great deal as it

was and for the rest trusted to the luck which had been a good friend to us thus far to carry us through.

This occupied the morning until noon. As we talked over things we had made the round of the walls of the Forbidden City, noting with satisfaction the depth and breadth of the huge moat which separated us from the outside world. The gate-houses were also of enormous strength and our men were on strict guard the whole time. Such persons and officials as entered were allowed to come inside, then seized and confined in the interior of certain pavilions put aside for the purpose. We had kongs of fresh water and as much food as we could spare put inside them for the refreshment of the prisoners, but whether it was sufficient or too little we never knew. In any case all the prisoners would be released on the morrow, and amongst those we had captured might easily be some big official, somebody worth capturing, and it was decided to hold a strict scrutiny of each as he was liberated.

On our return to the Throne Hall shortly after noon, we entered quietly and found the Emperor and his two advisers still busily writing away. We did not interrupt them. They broke off occasionally to discuss some point, but their task seemed on the whole to progress without a hitch.

Poor Kuang-hsu was still insensible and looked much worse than when we had left him. Dan told us he had moved slightly once or twice, but his breathing was difficult and the heart and pulse very weak. We

satisfied ourselves on these points at once, indeed I had to hold a polished knife blade before the wounded man's mouth to see if he breathed, so faint was his respiration.

"This looks bad" said Joe.

"I'm afraid it is as bad as it can be, Master Joe" said Dan.

"One comfort is, it was not any of our people who did it" I remarked. "It was his own aunt or whatever she is."

"It quite gives me the creeps, this place, Master Humphrey" said Dan, looking uncomfortably behind his shoulder. "As I sat here watching this morning I could have sworn someone was spying on us from behind those curtains. I could not be sure, but I think I saw the hangings move and there was the feeling of hidden eyes on me all the time."

I ascended the dais and raised the yellow hangings behind the throne to which Dan had referred. There was nothing visible but the cold grey wall, carved as I have described. I examined every stone within reach with care in which task Dan and Joe assisted me, but we were unable to find any trace of a secret opening.

"There is a secret passage here, I'm sure" I said. "How else could the old Empress have disappeared? I should not be at all surprised Dan if you had been watched this morning."

Dan shivered. "It's rather dangerous in here, then, I should think, Sir, for the Emperor" he said

pointing to Lien who was quietly writing with Lin and the Viceroy.

"Yes, Dan, you're right" I assented. "I will speak to them about it. There is no reason why this work should go on in here. But who is this? Apparently he has come to say tiffin is ready."

"I hope so" said Joe, "I'm quite ready for mine."

"Then your hopes are realized, for tiffin *is* ready" said Lin smiling at us after exchanging a few words with the attendant. "Come along, we have had a busy morning."

The Emperor arose and stretched himself. "Yes, I shall be glad of some food" he remarked. "Come along."

We had all got into the Courtyard when the Emperor suddenly said: "I've left the great seals on the table, I must get them" and was turning to go back, when I said, as I was bringing up the rear,

"Oh, don't trouble, Sire, I'm nearest, I'll run back and get them." I walked back to the Throne Hall and stepped inside. My eye rested on Kuang-hsu lying so quiet and deathlike. The Chinese attendant was seated at his side watching him. Dan had been relieved and told to come and get his tiffin with us. As I leaned over the table and took the two great jade seals, my glance rested for a moment on the yellow hangings. Could it be fancy? I felt sure they had moved. I gave another look at the group on the floor. They remained quiet

and motionless. I softly put back the seals on the table and made as quietly as possible for the curtains behind the thrones. As I mounted the steps I drew my revolver and held it in my right hand. With my left I quickly pulled apart the heavy hangings. A sound like a faint girlish laugh came from somewhere in the cold stone facing me, which I could have sworn I saw tremble for a moment and then remain still and lifeless as any wall. With my heart beating furiously I felt up and down the stones, but with no result, everything seemed the same as when I had examined it with Joe and Dan a few minutes ago. I returned to the table, gathered up the seals and walked across the courtyard to join the others at tiffin, thinking deeply.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEQUEST OF THE SOVEREIGN.

Dan was plainly overcome at sitting down to table with an Emperor, to say nothing of a Duke, a Viceroy and two Earls. He kept looking around in an apologetic way between every mouthful, to which confusion I am afraid I added by staring at him absent-mindedly whilst I turned over in my mind what I had just seen and whether it would not be as well to inform my companions of it. On the whole, I thought, they may as well know, and I would persuade the Emperor not to proceed with the drawing up of his documents in the somewhat creepy Throne Room during the afternoon, but bring his things over to the Pavilion in which we were sitting. So I said, suddenly,

“Sire!”

“Saltwood!”

“What a start you gave me, Humphrey” said Joe, whilst Dan simply dropped his fork and gasped.

“I’ve been thinking whether I ought to tell you or not. When I went back to get the seals just now,”—everybody stopped eating and looked at me apprehensively, “I thought I saw the hangings move—”

“I’m sure of it” interrupted Dan.

“—so I went up the steps on to the dais to investigate. As I pulled aside the curtains I could have sworn I saw the last tremor of the stones closing as

if a door had just been shut and—you'll think it silly—a woman laughed somewhere."

"Upon my word, Humphrey, why did you not say so before?" said Joe.

"Well, I did not see the necessity of alarming you" I replied. "And I thought as my nerves were a bit on edge owing to what we have been doing, I would like to think over it a little. You see, when one is nervous or—er, excited, one imagines things sometimes. But I don't think this was imagination. I believe there was really someone there."

"I think we had perhaps better go across and see" said Lin.

"They might steal away the Emperor whilst we are feeding ourselves" remarked Joe.

"Yes, and slaughter the Red Cross man."

"It would not be of much importance if they did commandeer Kuang-hsu" said Wan. "He is not much use to us even as a hostage, but a human life is a human life and we owe it him and to the attendant to go and see that all is right. I am going at once."

We all got up simultaneously and walked across the courtyard to the Throne Hall. On the way Joe said "All sorts of things may have happened by this time, old man. I can't imagine why you did not tell us at once."

"I have already explained, Joe," I said, "that I thought it might have been imagination owing to the overstrained — what was that?"

This conversation had carried us to the Throne Hall door, and my exclamation was caused by a distinct sound inside as of somebody hastily running across a stone floor at the alarm of our steps approaching. The Emperor was leading and quickly swung open the swing doors.

"Did you hear anything move?" he asked.

"Yes,—oh!"

The "oh" was occasioned by the distinct sound as of a door closed rather loudly. Now, so far as we knew there was no door leading into the Throne Hall other than the one in which we stood.

"Let's get inside" said Joe.

We all moved in and surveyed the Hall. I suddenly gave an exclamation and pointed to where we had left the Emperor Kuang-hsu. He had been dragged for a few yards across the stone flags, and now lay in a huddled heap half up the flight of one of the three sets of steps leading to the throne dais. The attendant still sat where I had seen him last, ominously still. We approached him gingerly. Then bending I raised his face. None of us will, I think, ever forget the look of horror that was stamped on that grinning countenance. He was quite dead and as we looked his lower jaw fell away and dropped in a hideous manner till it rested on his chest.

"Ugh!" said Joe.

I walked round the sitting corpse to its back and there saw the wound which had killed him. It was a

great jagged cut as if made by the stab of an enormous knife or sword and the blood was pouring out profusely. Even as we looked it began to run over the flags from the saturated garments. Seeing nothing more was to be done for him, with Dan's help I laid him flat and covered the dead terror-stricken face. We then joined the group who had raised the body of Kuang-hsu and were carrying it back to its couch.

"Is he dead?" I asked in a whisper.

No-one replied to my question, but Joe knelt and put his ear to the mouth, the very lips of which were white. He then held a knife before it for a moment and, taking it away, examined it.

"He is alive" he pronounced at last. "The blade is slightly misty. Get the brandy someone and rub his chest with it. Whoever was in here dropped him pretty quickly, they have started the wound in his head bleeding again."

We bound the cut up and stopped the flow of blood as much as we could. A slight colour began to ebb back into the yellow cheeks and the breathing became a little stronger.

"We can do nothing more, I fear" said Joe. "Dan, stay here and watch him."

"I trust you are not going to leave me alone, Sir?" said Dan.

"Certainly not" replied the Emperor. "We had best all stay together. How many men have we on guard in the courtyard?"

"There are thirty" I replied.

"Good" replied Lien. "I do not feel like any more tiffin now, but it is obvious we cannot leave Kuang-hsu alone. Leave the doors of the Hall wide open and we will get on with the documents. We will sit at the table facing the thrones, and you may be sure we shall hear the faintest sound from that direction."

"I suppose that is the only thing to be done" I replied. "Joe, run across and finish your tiffin and then come in here."

"This is distinctly uncanny, this place" said Joe. "At 5.30 it will be growing dark when I will immediately set off for the Anting and send in my reinforcements."

"I wish they were here now" said the Emperor. "However, let us get on with these things." He seated himself with Lin and Wan at the table which I had moved rather nearer the door than it was before. There they sat working quietly, facing the uncanny dais and the figure of Kuang-hsu lying on the floor with Dan on guard over him.

Joe came in again in a few moments, saying he had lost his appetite. Some soldiers had been sent in to remove the corpse and were finishing swabbing up the blood. Joe and I went instinctively to the dais for another examination. We passed behind the two thrones and the screen, and once more minutely examined the wall, but our search was as unsuccessful as the preceding ones.

"Its very strange" said Joe. "There must be a door somewhere here."

"Yes," I agreed, "But it has been well concealed. I should be more easy in my mind if the Emperor would do his work across the way."

"Impossible" said Joe. "We must all stick together, it is most undesirable to move Kuang-hsu, and we may as well be on watch where we know there is an avenue of attack."

"You're right" I said. "After being up all night, and an unusually active one at that, I am feeling confoundedly sleepy."

"So am I" said Joe. "I think we will have a nap in here for an hour or so. Dan must be tired too."

We walked over to the table where the Emperor was busily writing. "My brother and I will lie down and have a bit of a nap here, Sire, if you don't mind," I said, "and I should think you were in need of a rest too."

"I cannot sleep till I have done my work" replied Lien with a smile. "But go you and rest here, and let Dan have a rest too. I will have a man in to watch the invalid, and if anything happens you will be on the spot."

They instantly set to work again on their documents, so having seen a Chinese officer posted, Joe, Dan and I made ourselves as comfortable as possible on the floor with rugs and cushions. It was wonderful how tired we found we really were once we had laid

down; indeed, Dan was asleep in a minute. Just as I was drowsing off, Joe said,

"I wonder what made the doctor look so horrified?"

"Eh?" I questioned sleepily. "Oh, the Red Cross man. He did look awful, didn't he? He must have seen something he had better not have seen."

"I don't like this place, it makes one creep" said Joe.

"My dear fellow" I replied, "get to sleep. It is not a cheerful place, but you need not make it worse."

"All right, old man. Keep your hair on." Joe was silent for a minute and then he said. "He looked as though he had seen a ghost."

I was really too tired to argue and fell into a deep dreamless sleep. Violent exercise and excitement coupled with a healthy body are conducive to sleep.

I was suddenly awakened by the Emperor shaking my shoulder. "Wake up" he said, "Kuang-hsu has regained consciousness and we have finished drawing up the Proclamation."

I was wide awake in a moment. Kuang-hsu was sitting up, but I never saw a live man look more like a dead one. I roused Joe and Dan. Dan seemed to have extended a protecting wing over Kuang-hsu and went up to him at once and arranged his rugs. The sick man said something in Chinese. "Water" said Wan.

We brought him water in a cup and he drank a little and smiled peacefully. "I shall not be in your

way long, my brother" he said to Lien, "for this is the end, even as you said."

"I hope it is not so bad as that, Sire" said our Emperor instantly. "You must hope for a long happy life before you."

Kuang-hsu shook his head. "I feel that it is the end" he said. "Besides you would find me greatly in your way."

"At first, Sire, of course we should have to keep you in nominal imprisonment. But it would not amount to that really, you should have everything you wished for and after a few months you should go and live where you listed, who knows but that we might not profit by your wisdom and experience?" Our Emperor said this very earnestly and sweetly.

"I have not found my life so pleasant that I wish to hold it" replied Kuang-hsu almost with animation. "But I see you have been writing?"

"Yes, Sire. It is the Proclamation to the Nation which sets forth all we mean to do for China's good."

"That I essayed also" said Kuang-hsu sadly. "Is it asking too much if I may seek to know what measures you propose?"

"We shall tell you with the greatest pleasure in life, Sire" replied Lien. "I will summarise, later when you are better, you shall know the whole." He glanced over his papers. "First, we have promised a Constitution to Our people after the lapse of a few years when they shall have been prepared for it. We will govern the

Empire by a system founded on that of England. There will be a House of Representatives and another of appointed Peers. The Army will be reorganised on the model of that of Germany, and Commissioners will be sent to England to study their Naval system on which we would base our own. The present coinage will be in course of time abolished and a Gold Standard introduced and last, but not least, official corruption will be put down with a firm hand and an honest administration established in every corner of the Empire."

"You aim high, my brother" said the dying Emperor. "I tried to enforce some of these things, but first I had to purge my own Palace. One was there who was clever, far too subtle for me, and I was outwitted. Oh—"

He gasped a little and we gave him more water with a little brandy. It seemed to revive him and he presently resumed,

"Perhaps I might even then have carried my reforms through but one of my own trusted advisers, seeing as he thought the enemy too strongly arrayed against me, deserted me—"

Kuang-hsu stopped and looked hard at Wan Si Kai. The Viceroy hung his head and said,

"Man is weak, Sire. I was in terror of my life."

"So you serve your new master better than you have me, I ask nothing more, my lord" said Kuang-hsu gently. "He has great abilities" he went on addressing our Emperor, "I consider his abilities can hardly be

excelled in my—your Empire. You say the Proclamation is finished?" Lien assented. "Would I could wait to see it safely sealed" continued Kuang-hsu in a rapidly weakening voice. "Serve China—well—my brother—and—Heaven—grant thee—success—"

He stopped and we thought he was gone, but in a minute he revived again, the last flash of the flame. His voice came quite strong and clearly.

"Wilt thou accept thy Reigning Name, my Brother of Ming, from the last Emperor of the House that supplanted thine to be in turn deposed?"

"Sire!" I could hardly hear our Emperor speak, his voice was so low.

"You shall be known—as—Auspicious—Promise—" Kuang-hsu closed his eyes and settled down on his rugs. He gave a contented little sigh and with that his poor gentle well-meaning soul passed away. We stood for a moment silent gazing on the remains of the last of the Tsings. Then I said in a loud voice,

"The Emperor is Dead! Long live the Emperor!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET OF THE THRONE HALL.

We stood gazing at the dead body of Kuang-hsu for a few minutes, and then the Viceroy Wan knelt and gently closed the eyes. Still kneeling he turned his head and addressed our Emperor.

"It is true what he said, Sire. I failed him. But I had much at stake of which the least was my own life. Had it depended on me alone I had never deserted him. As it was—" and Wan sighed deeply.

"It is too late now, my lord, to repine" said the Emperor. "I depend on you in perfect confidence."

"I thank you, Sire. Be well assured I shall not fail again."

"It is well" said Lin. "His Majesty never doubted your loyalty, my lord." Then he turned to the Emperor saying affectionately. "You have succeeded to the Throne, Sire, as much by conquest as by appointment, for what his late Majesty said amounted literally to a nomination of you as his successor. With us primogeniture counts for nothing, but the nomination of his heir by the Reigning Sovereign is law. There cannot now be even a legal doubt of your right to rule over China."

"It is wonderful," said the Emperor. "But come, before these remains are cold let us formally seal and ratify these deeds which give" he lingered a little over

the words—"Auspicious Promise for better things to this my native land."

We all moved to the table on which the documents lay. Dan and I carried it up the Hall a little way so that the position was nearer the Throne where the light was better, for the daylight was dying fast. Lin, as Prime Minister, first placed the impression of one of the great seals on the Communique to the Legations and His Majesty then added the ratifying stamp of his own great seal. He and Lin then seated themselves at the table and gave a final glance through the Proclamation to the Nation. Wan Shih Kai, Joe and I stood on the opposite side of the table, facing the ill-omened throne dais, whilst Dan was close behind us. Presently their perusal was finished and Lin stamped his seal on the document which was of such importance to New China. Our Emperor then took his seal, and before pressing it on the vermilion preparatory to sealing, said:

"This is a great day for the Empire. None of you will ever forget the part you have taken in the first steps for the reformation of the government of this great land. This act will go down in history whilst the story of the nation lasts. Look well therefore at what we now do, and may the blessing of the King of Kings rest on Our act."

We felt, indeed, the solemnity of the occasion. There were we grouped in the dim Throne Hall of that age-old Empire. At our feet lay the body of the last Emperor of the old Line. Before us, with the great

jade seal balanced in his hand, stood the first Sovereign of the restored Dynasty of the ancient House of Ming. Outside the winter wind souged dreamily through the quaint peaked eaves, apart from that, all was perfect stillness. I shivered slightly and a tense feeling seemed to creep over me. Still the Emperor stood there, with the seal poised in his hand. He too, doubtless, felt the dignity and solemnity of the place and occasion. Then very slowly and carefully his hand descended and the impression of the Great Seal, which made the Proclamation Law, was made on the document.

His hand rested, holding the seal firmly pressed. Suddenly and clearly I heard the sound as of some sweet harp of which a melodious string had been sounded, though whence came the musical chord I could not think. The tense dreamy feeling has grown stronger on me. Why does the Emperor keep the seal so long pressed on the paper, and why, oh why, does he quietly and gently lean farther and farther forward until at last he seems to collapse over the table?

The Duke Lin raised his hand and placed it gently on the Emperor's shoulder. "Sire!" he said. Then he suddenly drew in his breath with a long sucking hiss, and with his eyes staring, pointed—pointed, and stood immovable.

Trembling and knowing not what to think we followed the line of his finger. He was pointing at the Emperor's back.

The long shaft of an arrow stood out firmly from between the shoulder blades. Motionless and horror-stricken we gazed at it, when suddenly the Emperor slid a little backwards. Then I saw the arrow had completely pierced him, the head being buried in the wood of the table over which he had slowly sunk down—the hope of our plot—the very hope of China.

How long all this took to happen I do not know, I seemed in a kind of stupor the whole time from which I was suddenly roused by Wan's howl of rage. This was echoed by Lin and following their eyes, mine flew to the dais.

There stood the Empress-Dowager, standing close behind the right hand throne. In her hand she held a gaily ornamented bow of which the string hung limply. From this must have come that strange sweet twang when her hand loosed the shaft which had transfixed the Emperor, speeding with an aim all too true. There she stood, upright and young looking, robed in the Imperial Yellow and with a smile of triumph over her face. Her eyes glittered in her head, then she raised her right hand and pointed with it at our group, which stood fascinated and horrified.

"Ye thought to conquer *me*? Whilst I live there is none alive who can compass that. I myself have wrought ruin here—look to your outposts!"

I grew cold all over. What did her ominous words portend? My eyes, turning limply, encountered Joe's face. He was looking with a strange eager expression in

Lin's direction. My head swung round sharply and again expectation was on the rack. Lin had drawn his revolver and was slowly raising it under cover of the table.

I turned from him instinctively, and again my gaze rested on the terrible old woman. Her position had not changed. Then she spoke again.

"Whilst I live I rule!"

Those were the last words she ever said. Hardly was the last out of her mouth when Lin's bullet was rushing to its destination. It struck her full in the breast. She staggered a moment and then gripped the back of the throne, a strange fearful look slowly stealing over her face. Her lips moved as if she tried to speak, then a convulsive shudder took her and she subsided into a heap on the marble floor.

"Quick!" Joe shouted and it woke me from my lethargy. Following him, I dashed up on the dais, jumped over the yellow heap from which a crimson stream had begun to run filling the spaces between the marble flags, and stood behind the thrones. With a quick movement we ripped down the yellow curtains. Not a sign of a door, the same blank wall. I stood looking stupidly at the stones for a minute. Then there was an exclamation from Joe and he fell heavily against me. I spun round and caught him in my arms. I was now facing the screen and the high backs of the thrones. Why had I never thought of it before? The boards at the rear of the right hand throne had opened backward,

and before me was a dark aperture. I peered fearfully down it. I saw stone steps descending, the flashing of fitful lights and of somebody moving down there.

"Help!" I shouted. "We are attacked!" Dan came rushing up followed by Wan Shih Kai. I pointed at the yawning gap. "Guard it!" I said and turned to look at Joe. He lay white and motionless against me, bleeding profusely from his side, the jacket being ripped as by a long glancing cut. On the floor at my feet was another arrow, the wooden shaft splintered to atoms from the shock with which it had struck the wall after wounding Joe. I dragged him hastily from the dais. "Oh, a light!" I appealed, "a light, for Mercy's sake!" Dan had followed me, alarm written in every feature. "Go back, Dan" I commanded, "Keep the door! That way danger comes. I will see to my brother. Joe, dear old man, speak to me!"

But he did not speak, he lay still and white where I had laid him, alongside dead Kuang-hsu. Were they ever going to bring me a light? Lin was sitting at the table, with his face in his hands, gazing at the transfixed body of our Emperor. "Duke!" I shouted, "Duke! Lin! Wake up! This is not place or time to mourn! Get me a light, anything, but quickly!"

He did not stir. Desperately I commenced to strip Joe's things off. As I did so I heard a noise at the doors of the Hall and one of our guard looked in. Lin suddenly got up, faced round at him and said a single word in Chinese, then he collapsed again and resumed his staring

at the Emperor, sitting on the other side of the table with an arrow through his body.

Apparently he had asked for a light, for three guards hurried in with a lanthorn. I had managed to get Joe's things off by that time, and now examined the long cut in his side. It was deep, but I thought not serious. With great foresight one of the guards had brought water with him. I dashed some over Joe's face and to my relief he gave a sigh and moved slightly. Then I bathed his side as well as I could and made him comfortable. He came too presently, as he opened his eyes they met mine Looking anxiously down into his.

"Cheer-oh, old man!" he said faintly. "I'm all right. Have they got in?" and then he fainted away again. I bathed his head again and gave him brandy, and presently to my delight he recovered consciousness and lay holding my hand and smiling contentedly, saying all the while,

"I'm all right. Don't you worry. I'm all right."

"God grant it" I said fervently.

"Now get to your post, old man" he said, and seeing I could do nothing more just then, I went on to the dais again and joined Dan and Wan before the secret door.

"How is Master Joe?" were the words Dan saluted me with and to my reassuring reply he gave a hearty "Thank God." Then

"Anything more happened here?" I asked.

"Nothing, Master Humphrey" he replied. "There must have been somebody wandering about down there with a light, but it is all darkness now."

I listened at the head of the gruesome steps with my head inside the door. Not a sound, except, yes, the distant drip of water.

"There was somebody here" I said. "The Empress, damn her, did not come alone. If so, whoever was with her will have gone back and told what has happened, so we may expect to be attacked from this side at any moment. I'll get some men in. Meanwhile keep a good watch here."

Dan nodded and Wan understood evidently. I passed from behind the thrones and looked at Joe. He nodded at me brightly. "Awfully sorry making such a fool of myself just at this time" he whispered apologetically. I pressed his hand and smiled, and then went on to Lin who still sat gazing at the Emperor.

"We must get this arrow out" I said. "He may not be dead. I will send in some men at once." Lin looked at me, but took no further notice, then resumed his unseeing gaze at the ghastly arrow. I turned sadly and moved across to the door. It was suddenly darkened as a man came hastily in.

"Who are you?" I asked harshly.

"Hello!" I heard Joe say faintly behind me, "That's my Second-in-Command. How do you do, General?"

I looked at the man in his fight-stained uniform. What news did he bring us? Was it good or only of more disasters?

CHAPTER XII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The new comer was plainly agitated.

"Please tell me as quickly as you can what is the matter" I said. "As you see we are rather in a mess here."

"I merely came to announce that we had carried out His Lordship's orders. They seemed rather extraordinary, but as instructed I acted before questioning, but am now come to ascertain exactly what has happened and what is to be done next."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "And who is his Lordship?"

"The Viceroy, Wan Hsi Kei."

"But I did not send any orders" exclaimed Wan, emerging from behind the Thrones.

Joe's General smiled. "No, because Your Excellency brought them yourself."

"I must be going quite mad" I exclaimed. "The Viceroy has been here all day, he has hardly been out of my sight."

The General became much disturbed. "Perhaps I had better tell you exactly what happened" he said. "Early this morning we received a signal from the Chien-men Gate that Mr. Saltwood was to come in to the Palace and report himself."

"Yes," I said. "I sent the message. That was all right."

The General bowed. "Well, Mr. Saltwood had not been gone half an hour when His Excellency Wan Hsi Kei arrived at the Anting Gate, where we had established our temporary headquarters." Wan stared, but I motioned the General to proceed. He went on,

"His Excellency asked to see me, and of course I went to him at once. He then explained that the Palace had been taken and the persons of the Emperor and Empress-Dowager seized. He said that they were then threatened with death unless they willingly abdicated, and issued a manifesto acknowledging the Ming as restored to his throne, which they did. His Excellency in conclusion said it was therefore now unnecessary to hold the walls of Peking, and that I was to take immediate steps to march my troops away to their Headquarters near Tientsin, camping in the usual way *en route*. The message was so important, the Viceroy added, that he had been deputed by the Emperor Lien to bring it in person so that there should be no mistake. I therefore immediately set about fulfilling my orders, and commenced to withdraw the troops. The army is now well on its way towards Fengtai, and having finished my work for the moment, I decided to come to the Palace before proceeding there myself."

We received this narration with varied feelings. Mine were that all was now lost, mingled with admiration at the mind that had conceived such a counterplot. Wan came down from the dais as pale as death, even Lin was listening with strained interest.

"I cannot understand" gasped the Viceroy.

"I think I can" I said. "It is that cursed old woman there" and I nodded towards the yellow heap lying so still on the throne dais. "When she saw how things stood, she slipped off through that secret passage, sent somebody disguised as Wan to the Anting Gate and ordered the troops away with a well constructed story which seemed probable on the face of it. We had to trust to luck all through. Do you know the Viceroy Wan Hsi Kei personally?" I asked the General.

"Not personally. I have seen His Excellency occasionally, but until this minute I had no idea that a deception had been practised. What is to be done?"

"Done? Done?" I echoed bitterly, "I do not know what is to be done except that we are 'done.'"

"Not a bit, old man" came Joe's voice, "we still hold the Palace, the old Emperor is dead, so is the Empress Dowager, so what more do you want?"

Then I laughed. "It's worth it" I said. "We will try and bluff it through. If only our Emperor is alive! Let us get that arrow out quickly. And Joe, my dear boy, how are you?"

"Ever so much better, brother" said Joe struggling to his feet but looking very pale. "I'll rest here a bit and be as right as anything in a few minutes. I am a bit thirsty, that's all. Thanks" as I gave him some water and brandy and then went to see what they were doing to our Emperor.

Lin was cutting away at the arrow shaft just behind the head where it came out of the Emperor's chest. The old Duke seemed to have suddenly recovered his faculties again. Wan and the General helped by supporting the inert body from behind. Presently they had cut through the tough wood. I took the arrow head as it was released—I have that iron relic still. Then with the exercise of some force the shaft was drawn back through the body, and the clothing stripped off. We bathed the wound as well as we could, then Lin said,

“He still lives, I think. Saltwood, a foreign doctor must be brought immediately.”

“I think so too” I said. “I cannot go myself, but I will send Dan.” The Duke nodded in acquiescence. “Dan” I continued, “you see how things are here. The Emperor's life may depend on you. Go out into the Legation Quarter at once and bring in a doctor. You will have to tell him something, probably, but we must have faith in your discrimination. I can promise a great reward to the doctor, but he must come and that quickly.”

Dan instantly got ready to depart. He came over to me before he went and said, “Good bye, Master Humphrey, trust me, I'll do my best. Keep your eye on Master Joe there.” I shook hands with the good fellow heartily, and went with him to the door. We had some difficulty in opening it. I fumbled at the catch and then Dan had a try.

"I do believe" he said at last, "that we are locked in."

"Don't be stupid, Dan" I said and attacked the fastening violently but to no avail. Then, "Wan" I shouted, "come here, I believe we are locked in."

The group around the wounded Emperor separated as if I had thrown a bomb at them, and Wan and the General came hurrying towards us. As they did so I heard a sound outside as of men forming up.

"What the devil's happening now?" I said. There was a window heavily closed with curiously blended beams above our heads to the right of the door. I motioned towards it, and was assisted on to Dan's shoulders. From thence I was able to command a clear view of the courtyard. What I saw paralyzed me for the moment.

"Lord have mercy on us" I managed to get out at last. "Where's the Viceroy?"

"Here" came Wan's voice from below me.

"Then you are outside as well" I replied. For there, hurriedly forming the men up, was a counterpart of the Viceroy. Even as I looked he gave an order and our men were marched across the court and out of the gate. As they vanished the gate closed behind them. At the same moment there was a rush of a couple of officers from the other side of the court, and it at once began to fill with Manchu soldiery.

"Trapped, by George" I muttered, and jumped to the ground, upsetting Dan as I did so.

"What do you mean?" asked the General anxiously.

I hurriedly explained what I had seen. I ended by saying. "This is the conclusion of the old Empress' plot. She is a deep one if ever one lived."

"*Was*" corrected the General. "Thank God she is dead now."

"Well, what is to be done?" I asked. Just then there came a heavy knocking at the door and a voice shouted through it in Chinese.

"What does he say?" I asked.

"The equivalent of 'open in the name of the Empress and Emperor'" said the General grimly. "Don't you see what has happened? They have used the same strategy here as they employed at the Anting Gate. This man disguised as the Viceroy is ordering our Troops out of the Palace, and meanwhile we—" he ended and I felt he was quite expressive enough. The banging commenced on the door again in a way which shewed they were not in the humour for playing with.

"Well, it's all up, I suppose" I groaned. "We have still the secret passage."

"We must be quick," said Wan. "Come!"

Joe declared he was well able to walk, and demonstrated it by running down one side of the Hall and back again, which was the very best way he could have chosen to shew how ill he really was. However, it was no time for argument, and we proceeded to construct a litter for the Emperor out of any materials that came to hand. We used the red lacquered poles tipped

with golden figures which stood round the throne for this purpose, and with rugs and cushions in a few minutes had a passable stretcher ready.

"Come along" said Lin, "I will lead the way."

They carried the Emperor on to the dais and with considerable difficulty got him to the bottom of the stone steps under the throne. I was the last to leave that ill-omened throne hall, and as I did so stooped to examine the dead Empress. I turned the yellow heap over gingerly. Her face was horrible to behold, screwed up into such an astounding grin of ferocity that I hastily capsized her again. "If ever anybody cursed when dead, she is doing it now" I thought. Then I followed the cavalcade down the steps, first swinging the secret door too after me.

Arrived at the bottom of the steps, we found the passage turned round on itself and proceeded in a northerly direction. We had followed it for a few yards, when by the light of the dim lantern we carried we saw a flight of steps going up to the left in another stone passage.

"Go straight on" I whispered from behind. Our party had just passed the steps when, as I was bringing up the rear, I heard a sound from above and saw the glimmering of a carried light, momentarily getting nearer. Then I heard the sound of rapidly approaching feet.

"Hurry on" I whispered, at the same time putting out our light. We stumbled on for a few yards and then

lay passive, as from behind us some thirty armed people poured out of the aperture from which the steps descended and turning, rushed along the way we had just traversed. By the light of their lanterns I saw they were all heavily armed. We had had a narrow escape. As soon as the last man had disappeared in the direction of the secret door, I hurriedly lighted our lantern again and told our people to get ahead for all they were worth. And along that dismal passage we stumbled as quickly as we could, going we knew not whither.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUTWITTED.

The General and Wan carried the rear of the Emperor's litter and Dan went in front carrying the two poles which projected in advance. Joe followed and I brought up the rear of the procession. We hurried forward as quickly as we could go. The passage seemed to widen a little and then gave a decided turn to the right. The same moment it began to descend.

"I wonder how deep it is going" I said, when I was interrupted by a hearty "Damn" from Dan. It appeared he had struck his head on the roof, which rapidly lowered, until we had only a height of four and a half feet in which to walk. This rendered it considerably more difficult for the Emperor's bearers, but they struggled gamely along. The stone passage smelt damp and all sorts of fungus clothed the walls, great toad-stools or perhaps mushrooms which, where they fell on the floor, made the going slippery and I once or twice nearly fell over.

It was on recovering from one of these slips that I heard the pursuit in full cry behind us.

"Buck up Dan!" I whispered, "they are coming after us!"

The passage now gave a more decided dip, and what with that and the slipperiness we were going as fast as was safe, especially as we carried a sorely wounded man. The lights the pursuers carried were now

visible dancing along behind us. They were using no disguise, but shouted horribly, which had a most awful effect in the confined passage, the echo rolling backwards and forwards. So soon as I could distinguish forms, I wheeled round and let them have a couple of shots from my revolver. I think I winged someone, but it did not stop them and they came on as fast as ever.

We proceeded in this way, doubled up in the low passage for about another hundred feet, when Dan's voice came from in front,

"Look out, Master Humphrey! I'm going through water!" Sure enough the floor was covered with water which, as the now more gradual descent went on, drew up from our ankles to our knees.

"If it gets much deeper, it will fill the passage" remarked Joe calmly.

"I am afraid it will, old man" I said. "Anyhow, we'll press on as far as possible. We can hold the place against any number for as long as you like."

"I hope it will not be too long then," said Lin. "We shall have plenty to drink. but I am not sure about the food."

We were pressing on all this time with the enemy gradually nearing us. The water was now over three feet deep, and it became apparent we could not go any further. We were stooping as it was with the low roof of the passage, and the position was becoming more impossible every minute. I was just about to give the word to stop when Dan sang out,

"Here's a wall right across the passage, Master Humphrey. We shall have to stop here whether we like it or not."

I said nothing. There was nothing to be said. The bearers were resting the stretcher on their shoulders on which the Emperor lay motionless. By our flickering light I could see the wall ahead of us. It apparently blocked the passage entirely, and the water lapped on the slime covered stones shewing about a foot and a half until where it was built into the roof.

Dan had faced around and was looking at me over the top of the litter. The General and Wan Hsi Kei leaned heavily together supporting their burden, breathing heavily, evidently very exhausted. Joe was between me and Lin. My brother was rolling up his sleeves and getting ready for the tussle. Lin stared up the passage in the direction of the approaching lights, a weird wild look in his eyes. Joe caught my eye and gave me a nod and a smile.

"God bless you, old chap" he said.

I nodded back and gave his hand a grip under the water, then I turned to the enemy and prepared to give them a warm reception.

They were soon close to us and in good view. Lin and I gave them a volley, which cooled their ardour somewhat. They retired a little, dragging three of their number with them. Presently they levelled their guns. We all ducked instinctively and I heard the shot strike

the stone near us. This undignified duck was our salvation for Dan spluttered excitedly,

"Master Humphrey! This wall is a blind. It only goes a bit below the water and there is a passage under it. I nearly fell backwards through it just then."

"Not much good Dan, if it is full of water" said Joe. Dan, however, having secured the litter on the General's and Wan's shoulders, had disappeared under the water, evidently intent on examining the obstruction. In a minute he came up again and eagerly addressed us.

"It's all right. If we dip under the wall the passage goes on beyond. There is plenty of room."

"Good for you, Dan" I said. "We will have to get the litter under somehow, though the Emperor will have a wetting. Be as quick as you can."

They got ready and then Dan went under dragging the litter with him. I stood by the wall and pressed the middle of it down, and then the other two bearers ducked too, and with rather an effort I felt the Emperor's body in its clinging wrappings being pushed through. It appeared afterwards that it went through quite easily, and Dan had Lien's head out of the water in no time. The Viceroy went through after with a rush and a splutter, but the old General was not so adroit, and rising before it was time, crashed his head on the under side of the wall. I felt him clawing desperately at my legs and pulled him up to the surface still on my side of the barrier. So soon as he had got

his breath, however, he made another and a successful try. Lin then went, and at my nod Joe followed.

For a moment I stood alone on the inner side of the wall looking back along the way we had come. Our light had gone out when we ducked at the shots, but I could see the faint illumination far up the passage where our pursuers had retreated. They were quite silent now, perhaps they did not like the idea of attacking us in that ghastly hole. I was drawing a deep breath preparatory to getting under the wall, when an extraordinary thing happened.

Whether it was imagination acting on my strained nerves, or whether it was reality, I cannot for the life of me say. But there came echoing down the passage the laugh of a woman, a laugh such as a woman in hell might give. It turned me cold all over, even though I was standing in that chilly water, whose contact in my excitement I had hardly noticed until now. The laugh echoed along the stones, drawing nearer and nearer in a ghostly manner, struck the wall at my back it seemed to be audibly, and then echoed back the way it had come. With an indescribable fear in my heart, I ducked under the water and scrambled up on the other side as quickly as I could.

"Come on, old man, I was just beginning to wonder what had happened and was coming back for you" said Joe.

"It's all right" I said shakily, "let us push on as quickly as we can."

"Dan has some wax matches" remarked Lin.
"We struck one and the passage seems to go straight on."

We pushed ahead cautiously, feeling every step. To our relief the way began to ascend, and we were soon clear of the icy water. Dan struck a wax vesta from time to time, but we all bumped our heads a good deal. Soon the way become higher and with a sigh of relief I found I could carry my head erect. It is the most natural and comfortable way, and besides a Salt-wood is wont to carry his head thus.

"I rather think" said Lin, "we have gone under the Palace Moat."

"I believe you are right, Duke," I replied. "I hope so, because if this passage leads anywhere we shall find ourselves outside the Forbidden City."

"It is the only way out for us, then" said Joe.
"We should not have much chance the proper way."

"How are you feeling, old man?" I asked.

"Fairly all right" he replied. "That cold bath did me good."

After this we went on in silence for about a quarter of an hour. The way was lightened every now and then by Dan striking a match, and I and Lin relieved the two tired bearers of the litter. Suddenly Dan, who was leading, stopped.

"Here are some stairs" he said.

"Thank goodness," I exclaimed, "we have come to the end of the passage at last. Can you see anything, Dan?"

"Wait till I strike another match, Master Humphrey" said Dan. He did so, and we all saw a flight of stone steps ascending, to where a square in the roof was covered with a wooden trap door.

The litter was placed on the ground, and Dan went up stairs to investigate. He could not move the trap, though he pushed with all his might. Then Lin and I went and leant our united efforts, which had the result of moving it.

"Heave!" I said, "Heave!"

We put all our strength into it, and the door suddenly opened with unnecessary celerity. We all shot half out and then dropped back again in a confused heap. At the same moment there was a scared yell from above and the sound of feet taking a hurried departure. I was too thankful to breath the sweet fresh air which came streaming in to take much notice of much else at the moment, but when we had all filled our lungs several times, we took up the litter again, and with much difficulty succeeded in getting it and its occupant up the steps and into the Chinese room into which the secret passage gave access.

When we had all reached the upper air again, I closed the trapdoor and discovered we had upset somebody's bed in making our unceremonious exit.

"We seem to have come out into a private house" I said. "I suppose the passage has been forgotten. There was plenty of dust in the cracks of the door this

side, evidently, and there is no signs of a door now that we have replaced the cover."

"In any case they may be following, the sooner we get out of this place the better" said Joe.

"I agree with you" said Lin. "I wonder who lives here? We must have given whoever it is a fine alarm."

"The upheaval of one's bed in the middle of the night is alarming" I said. "The position has its comic side, which we shall doubtless appreciate at some future time. Just now, let us get out of it as quickly as possible."

We accordingly shouldered the litter again, and leaving the house crossed a small mud walled courtyard, and emerged into a road. We carefully looked up and down it, but not a sign of anybody could be seen.

"Fortunate" I remarked. "Whoever it is we have scared has had a good run for it. Does anyone know where we are?"

"There's the North Star" said Joe.

"So it is. This street then runs due north and south and from its width must be one of the main roads. I fancy it is the Hatamen Road."

"It is" said Wan Hsi Kei. "There is the London Mission and the Kettler monument."

I recognised our whereabouts at once. We must have come nearly half a mile under ground, going roughly due east from the Forbidden City.

We at once set off down the Hatamen Road towards the Legation quarter. I directed them to go at once to my lodgings in the British Legation, which I had not yet finally vacated.

"I will go ahead" I said "and tell some story to the sentry. When you come up, go in at once and get the Emperor undressed and in bed. I'll have the Doctor along almost as soon as you are there."

I left them and went on in advance. I crossed the Austrian and Italian Glacis, and entered the Legation quarter by the canal gate near our Legation. The main entrance is a few hundred yards down the road, and here I was stopped by the sentry. He was a man of the Cameron Highlanders, and I have never been so pleased to see the kilts as I was on that occasion.

"Look here, sentry" I said. "I'm Sir Humphrey Saltwood. We have had a bit of an accident on a shooting expedition and fallen into a river. One of us has been injured and my friends are bringing him along in a litter. Let them in when they arrive, I have told them to go to my quarters. I am going to rouse out the Doctor now."

Having paved the way thus, I soon had the Legation Medico out of bed. "Urgent case, Brown" I explained. "Don't ask questions now, please, there's a good fellow, but come along as quickly as you can. Shooting accident."

Brown was soon dressed and we hurried across the lawns to my rooms where we arrived at the same time

as the cavalcade. The Doctor asked no questions, but helped us undress the Emperor and put him in my bed. Then he held a thorough examination. We waited in great suspense for his verdict. At last he had finished his examination, and said,

"He will live." Lin gave a great sob of joy. After giving a few directions, he announced his intention of going across to his rooms to get a few necessities, when he would return at once. As he was leaving the room, he beckoned to me, and I followed him out.

"Shooting accident, did you say, Saltwood?"

I looked at him, but said nothing.

"Funny bullet he had through him, eh?" Then turning to me he laid his hand on my arm. "There is something fishy here, my good fellow. I don't like it. I won't accept the responsibility. You must let Sir Denis know."

"I'll tell him in the morning" I promised. "Only do your best for the patient meanwhile" I said earnestly. He said he would. As he was going I suddenly remembered Joe too was hurt. "I say, Brown" I called after him, "hang on a moment. My young brother has had a dig in the side too."

"What!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "All right, I'll see to him when I come back. But mind, Sir Denis in the morning!"

I nodded. Then I returned to my room and its strange disordered inmates.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DIPLOMACY OF SIR DENIS.

EPILOGUE.

The Emperor, although very seriously injured, would recover, pronounced the Doctor after another examination. The icy water had apparently done him some good. Joe's hurt was also examined and bound up. The Doctor ordered him to go to bed for a week after which time he would be all right, as it was, a little fever had set in, and no wonder.

Sir Denis had just finished his breakfast when I went across to see him in the morning. In answer to my message he said he would see me at once, so I was ushered in to his study immediately.

"Good morning, Saltwood" he exclaimed. "Where have you been these last few days? You are looking thinner, I declare, and, positively, you are looking very grim. What has happened?"

"That's what I came over to see you about, Sir Denis," I said. "I have been on—er—a little shooting expedition with my young brother and some friends, and we have had a couple of nasty accidents."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Nobody killed, I hope?"

"About a dozen or so—oh—yes, of course, no, there is nobody killed."

Sir Denis looked surprised. "Your manner is somewhat disconnected" he said. "Who has been injured?"

"We all got capsized into a river last night" I explained, "and my brother got rather a nasty dig in the side with a sharp piece of stick or something. One of our Chinese impaled himself on another, but I've got them all at my quarters and Brown has been looking after them. Nothing very serious, Joe has to stay in bed for a week and we have hopes that His—the—the Chinaman will recover."

"Are you telling me quite the truth, Sir Humphry?" The Minister was eyeing me keenly. "The Chinaman must have been very badly hurt if you say 'you have hopes he will recover.'"

Before I had time to reply to this, the door opened and Brown put his head in. "May I come in?" he asked. "I heard Saltwood was here and I thought you might want to ask me a few questions about the patients."

"That's very good of you," I said a trifle stiffly, "but I think I have told Sir Denis all about it now."

"It is a most extraordinary thing" remarked Sir Denis. "Here is Saltwood with a story of a shooting expedition and two men impaled with stakes—"

"Impaled?" This was from the Doctor.

"It must be quite a new departure for you, Brown" went on Sir Denis. "You don't have a patient with a beam through his body every day."

Brown was looking from me to the Minister. I felt rather uncomfortable. Sir Denis began to smell a rat.

"What's the matter, you two? You look as if you were both mixed up in a conspiracy. Been killing the

Emperor and the Empress-Dowager? Why, begad, Saltwood, you have got quite pale!"

I made a ghastly attempt at a smile. "Fact is, Sir, my nerves are a bit on edge. The—"

I was interrupted by the entrance of one of the Secretaries who went up to Sir Denis, gave him a sealed envelope, and left us.

"Scuse me for a moment." He opened the cover and read the paper contained in it. Then he gave a violent start.

"Brown, leave Sir Humphrey and I alone, will you?"

The Doctor went out, visibly curious. I wondered what had happened now. I examined a bronze vase on the table, accutely conscious of the Minister's scrutiny. Then he said,

"The Emperor died last night."

I said "Oh."

"Saltwood, what does this mean?"

I gave him back look for look. "Sir Denis," I said, "have you ever heard anything of the history of my family?"

"Eh! Er—yes, some ancestor of yours was mixed up with the last of the Mings or something, isn't that how the tale goes!"

"That is how it goes, Sir Denis. As His Majesty's Minister there are some things you cannot know." The diplomat smiled. "This is one of them. I must ask you to be content with what I have told you. Perhaps

you can put two and two together. Perhaps I shall tell you some day. Who knows? Meanwhile—" I stopped. Sir Denis considered for some time. Then he said,

"May I come across and see your brother? I should also like to see the impaled man. It is a curiosity, you know, an impaled man, especially when—am I putting two and two together?"

He was smiling. "Very skilfully, Sir" I replied. "But come over, and see my brother and—the impaled man."

"In a few minutes, Saltwood. I must reply to this note from the Doyen, and I have a few arrangements to make. The Emperor dead! Well! Well!"

He kept me waiting about half an hour and then walked over to my quarters with me. He had a look at Joe, who was sleeping, and then I shewed him our other invalid. He gazed at him curiously for a long time. "I wonder if it would have been for the best," he said musingly after a while, then he turned and favoured me with another long regard. At last he said, "I must go now, but one more word. I leave it to you, Saltwood, not to take refuge in this Legation if it is liable to cause complications." He nodded to me and as he turned to go, I said,

"Trust me, Sir."

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Sitting here, high up amongst the mountains on the Roof of the World, in leaf-quivering Jumlambo, I have been writing this story of the adventures we have been

through. For three peaceful weeks, Joe, Dan and I have been recouping in this ancient Monastery, and to-morrow morning we leave by the Himalayan passes *en route* for Simla and Calcutta, and so to old England. To-night we took leave of the Emperor, and it seems fitting that I should have also just come to the end of my story too, and can close it on this our last night with the Ming.

After my conversation with Sir Denis, I felt the necessity of removing my patients at once, and after anxious discussion with Wan and Lin, we decided to take them to Tientsin, and put the Emperor into Hospital there. We would not risk remaining in the Capital. The Chinese Government announced the deaths of the Emperor and Empress in due course, and all the world wondered at the mysterious happenings. The official announcement stated Kuang-hsu died on the 13th November and the Empress-Dowager on the following day. What followed in the Palace after our escape we shall probably never know. This only we know in common with the rest, the dead Emperor's brother was proclaimed Prince-Regent and his infant nephew the new Emperor. Another puppet on the Dragon Throne to be used by scheming princes and mandarins, and perhaps, who can tell, another Empress-Dowager.

We were in some anxiety as to the fate of Wan Hsi Kei whose complicity in the plot was of course known to the authorities. Having seen us safely bestowed in Tientsin, Wan put himself at the head of the provincial army and feeling secure in his power,

quietly awaited developments. It is a matter of history his disgrace in the latter days of November, and the reproaches of the Great Powers assailed the Throne that had sent away the strong man of the nation. Knowing what we did, we could not blame the Prince-Regent and his advisors, but were sufficiently glad that Wan, protected by his power, was merely retired in disgrace. Will he ever come forward again to sail the ship of state into calmer waters and to a more propitious destiny? That, only time can answer.

After an anxious month, our Emperor became convalescent and was pronounced fit to travel. Accompanied by Lin we took him to Shanghai on board the Jardine steamer "Hangshing," and thence went up the Yangtsze to Ghankin. Here we arranged to go overland to Thibet, for it had been decided we should all go together to Jumlambo. The 3000 solders in garrison there, at the time we arrived, were in a state of mutiny against the provincial government. Their officers had already been won over to the Ming side, as I told you before, and we easily persuaded them to give us the escort of their whole force to the frontiers of Thibet. Without them, I am doubtful if we should ever have accomplished the journey. We lived on the land as we went, and nobody was strong enough to arrest our course. The soldiers had not been paid for months by their government and the marauding expedition just suited them, they were able to fill their pockets and their bellies, and when we had no further use for them,

they would melt away in the huge wildernesses of Szechuan, a regular immigration. Looking over the papers since, which are sent to the Monastery weekly, I saw our progress was described to the world as "a rebellion in the South." How common this is, any old China hand well knows.

And so we came to Jumlambo.

To-night we bade adieu to the Emperor Lien. He received us in a great hall, the windows ranged on one side of which look out over the mountains of the Himalayan Range whose snowy tips stood out against the saffron sky, tinted with delicate pink, kissed by the setting sun.

As we entered, the Emperor rose to meet us and walked forward with his hand on Lin's arm. He was smiling, but there was a sad tone about his voice now that the time had come for parting.

"And so you must go?" he began. "Well, we have chosen wisely in our friends. Without you we could not have done what we have done. Some day, perhaps, in Heaven's own time, we shall try once more and when that time comes, we shall call for you again." He stopped and sighed wistfully, and I said,

"We shall be ready when you need us, Sire, my brother and I. Old Dan, too, count on us when the time comes."

"And it will surely come," said Lin quietly.

"It gives me pain to say good-bye to you," resumed the Emperor, "and a wise man does not prolong pain."

Good bye, Dan, and we thank you for the good service you have done us. Thanks are all that remain in the gift of a throneless king."

"I ask for nothing more, your Majesty" said Dan. "Where my two masters go, there I go too, as a matter of course. If I have served your Majesty I have only done my duty, and as you are pleased, Sire, that is all I ask."

The honest fellow stopped and the Emperor shook hands with him with real feeling. Then as Dan took up his position behind me, His Majesty addressed Joe.

"My dear Joe, what can I say to you. You have led my army and have shed your blood for me. I shall never forget it. Some day let us hope I shall see you again."

"Surely, Sire" replied Joe. "Why not come to England where we shall have many things to shew you? Saltwood Castle would welcome your presence."

"It may be that I shall remember your invitation" said the Emperor. "Until then, good bye and thank you. Would that I could thank you according to your deserts! Good bye!"

They shook hands. The Emperor's eyes were suspiciously moist when he turned to me.

"I have something for you, Sir Humphrey" he said. He motioned to Lin, and the Duke went over to where a small table stood against the wall which had on it two bulky objects, wrapped in yellow silk. One of

these Lin brought to the Emperor, who took it, and then addressed me.

“For nearly two hundred years, Saltwood, this Seal has remained in safe keeping in the hands of your house. I could not wish it more trusty guardians. Take it, then, and some day we may call for you to bring it to us again.”

I was profoundly moved. I could only take it in silence and stood holding it awkwardly. The Emperor spoke once more,

“Good bye. We have stood back to back and we have fought some good fights together—”

“May they not be the last, Sire” I interrupted.

“As you say, we shall live to strike another blow for the Throne some day when the time is come. Dear friend—”

I think he was about to say something more, but his emotion overcome him. He could only give me his hands which I shook and held firmly for a few moments. Then with wet eyes he turned, and we saw his graceful figure disappear behind the hangings.

We all went and looked out of the windows, feeling a bit low for the moment. The saffron of the sky had deepened into russet and the snow peaks were bathed in crimson lake. I felt someone ought to say something, but as nobody volunteered, I remarked,

“Well, you fellows, we have an active day before us to-morrow. I want to finish some writing to-night

too. Come along. We shall see you, Duke, in the morning? Good,—then, au revoir.”

So here I am come to the last word. Tomorrow we shall say good bye to the last of our fellow plotters. I enjoyed it whilst it lasted, and if we did not succeed in the end, that was Fate, and if at first you don't succeed, well, try, try, try again, you know. Will the Emperor come to England? Will the opportunity ever present itself again to strike a blow for an Empire? Time will answer that and I can find it in my heart to wish for the day when we can once again try to renovate China's Glory and once more, to that end, enter into an Imperial Conspiracy.





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